

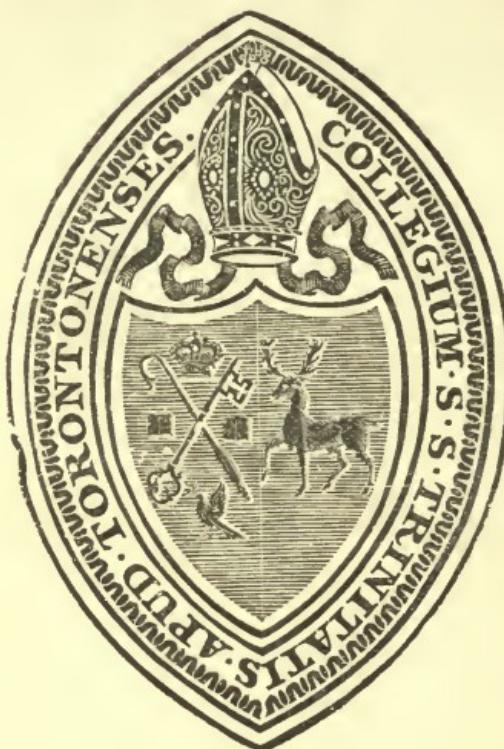
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# HULSEAN LECTURES

FOR THE YEAR 1832.

PRINCIPLES

FOR

THE PROPER UNDERSTANDING

OF

# THE MOSAIC WRITINGS

STATED AND APPLIED;

TOGETHER WITH

AN INCIDENTAL ARGUMENT

FOR THE TRUTH OF

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD.

---

BY THE REV. J. J. BLUNT,

FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE first seven of the following Lectures are upon questions arising out of the Mosaic writings. They are treated upon their own merits, though with a reference to a popular “History of the Jews” which appeared no long time ago, and of which I thought the views on these points erroneous. Probably the remaining Lecture would have applied to the same portion of scripture; but as one of the Sundays on which the Lectures were delivered happened to be Easter Sunday, it appeared to be due to that great festival to choose a subject appropriate to it, and accordingly the eighth Lecture is an argument

for the truth of the Resurrection of our Lord,  
as a matter of fact.

On the resignation of the office of Lecturer  
I have to repeat my acknowledgements to  
the Trustees under Mr. Hulse's will for their  
acceptance of my services a second year.

SUBSTANCE OF CERTAIN CLAUSES IN THE WILL  
OF THE REV. J. HULSE, M.A.

[Dated July 21, 1777.]

HE finds a Lectureship in the University of Cambridge.

The Lecturer to be a ‘ Clergyman in the University of Cambridge, of the degree of Master of Arts, and under the age of forty years.’ He is to be *elected annually* ‘ on Christmas-day, or within seven days after, by the Vice-Chancellor for the time being, and by the Master of Trinity College, and the Master of St. John’s College, or any two of them.’ In case the Master of Trinity, or the Master of St. John’s, be the Vice-Chancellor, the Greek Professor is to be the third Trustee.

The duty of the said Lecturer is, by the Will, ‘ to preach *twenty* Sermons in the whole year,’ at ‘ Saint Mary Great Church in Cambridge;’ but the number having been found inconvenient, application was made to the Court of Chancery for leave to reduce it, and *eight* Sermons only are now required. These are to be printed at the Preacher’s expense, within twelve months after the delivery of the last Sermon ; and the present volume is the second that has appeared under the new regulations.

The subject of the Lectures is to be ‘ the Evidence

for Revealed Religion ; the Truth and Excellence of Christianity ; Prophecies and Miracles ; direct or collateral Proofs of the Christian Religion, especially the collateral arguments ; the more difficult texts, or obscure parts of the Holy Scriptures ;' or any one, or more of these topics, at the discretion of the Preacher.

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# HULSEAN LECTURES.

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## LECTURE I.

GENERAL EXPECTATION OF THE MESSIAH.

LUKE XXIV. 27.

*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*

THE true key to the writings of the Old Testament, as well as of the New, is the doctrine of a *Redeemer*; a principle which, as I shall apply it in several of my future sermons, I will now endeavour to establish once for all. Not that I hereby affect to propound any new thing, for it is a doctrine which was scarcely disputed in the best ages of the Church, and in some ages was carried even to a fanciful excess, but the abandonment or at least the unworthy suppression of

which has marked and injured some of the theological literature of these latter days, and more particularly a popular work of our own time which has professed to be a history of the Jews. In treating this subject however, at present, I shall not merely produce an array of texts selected from the books of Scripture in their order, adapted to illustrate the principle of which I have spoken, though neither shall I decline so doing altogether, but I shall rather gather together a few scattered arguments, such as the reason of the thing, and history sacred or profane, may furnish, to prove that it did enter very largely into the faith and hopes of the earlier generations of mankind, and must be distinctly recognised by any man more especially, who undertakes to put his readers in possession of the annals of the chosen race.

Now, arguing *à priori* only, it is impossible

to believe that our first parents, born in Paradise, compassed on every side by objects pleasant to the sense, erect in their spirits, conscious of no ill, apprehensive of no misfortune, blessed with mental faculties as yet unclouded by prejudice or passion, the glorious image of God,—it is impossible, I say, to believe that creatures born to such a lot, should not have had their fall, a fall from so pernicious a height, in everlasting remembrance, or that the appalling spectacle of death, brought into the world by their transgression, when first it presented itself, should have failed to make their hearts sink within them for the abyss into which they had cast themselves down. The contrast of what they were with what they had been, would be the burden of their sleeping and waking thoughts ; and their children would hear and transmit

to their children in turn, the woeful history of the inheritance which they had lost. It is not in human nature that it should be otherwise. It is matter of common experience that the posterity of a decayed family are peculiarly alive to the departed honours of their race; that the lands which once knew them, but which now know them no more, are still watched by them with a jealous eye; the offence by which they were forfeited, however remotely, remembered; and if a hope even against hope, of a recovery remain, it is the reed on which they habitually repose. But if the estate be a crown or a kingdom, when can the memory of it be extinguished then? Still the empty title descends; still the visionary expectation of brighter days is indulged; still the pageant of a name, or the superscription of a coin be-

speaks the possession which is gone, and the pang which it costs to relinquish the dream of its restitution.

But when mankind fell from their high estate, a sure and certain hope was held out to them, that the day would come when it should be again their own. The serpent had beguiled the woman of it, and ‘the seed of the woman’, it was promised, should in due season ‘bruise the serpent’s head.’ It is probable that much more than this hint was communicated to our first parents, for the expectation of this Deliverer forthwith begins and continues to heave and ferment in the patriarchal history in a manner corresponding to more ample information than this single word of encouragement might seem to convey; and nobody can read attentively the writings of Moses without constantly perceiving that they are records in very brief;

perpetually opening a glimpse of some region of knowledge which we should fervently desire to explore ; dropping some casual allusion to events such as baffle investigation ; and presenting some expression or other in the midst of a narrative of unrivalled simplicity, in which far more is evidently meant than meets the ear. I will not stay to produce proofs of this fact, feeling that it can be called in question by none to whom the Mosaic writings are in any degree familiar. I say then that this communication, of a future Redeemer from the curse of the fall, which God in pity to his poor creatures hastened to make, lest, as it should seem, they should be utterly broken-hearted, works very actively in all the story of the patriarchs. It may be suspected to dictate the ejaculation of Eve on the birth of her first-born, ‘I have gotten a man, *even Jehovah*’, (for so it has been trans-

lated,) even the promised seed, the God in man. It suggested to Lamech the name of *Noah* for his son, a figure of Christ, he, St. Peter, being our authority<sup>a</sup>, seeing that ‘this same should *comfort* them’, as he hoped, ‘concerning the work and toil of their hands, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed’; possibly take the curse off. It guided Abraham in his course still more manifestly, as I shall hereafter attempt to shew more at large; for to him the promise was renewed, and in terms limiting it to his line, and yet more significant and definite in their meaning than before; so that the history of that patriarch, interpreted as it is by passages in the New Testament, argues in him a very circumstantial acquaintance with the Redeemer to be born. Isaac, a figure of Christ the least to be mistaken, becomes the

<sup>a</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21.

next transmitter of the ‘Desire of the Nations’; to whom Jacob succeeds, but not without much contrivance and contention and forfeiture of family peace, so stirring was this hope of giving Him birth; and Jacob, when he was dying, still bare it in prospect, and prophesied of which of his sons Shiloh should spring. And under Moses, who himself ‘esteemed the reproach of Christ’, we are told, ‘greater riches than the treasures of Egypt’<sup>a</sup>, the coming event cast its shadow before still more distinctly; and the types of it were more frequent, and the scape-goat and the paschal lamb, with all the peculiarities annexed to either, narrowed more and more the latitude of conjecture as to the mode of redemption; and thus was the rumour sped onward, echoing still more and more loudly through the interval that preceded the fulness

<sup>a</sup> Heb. xi. 26.

of time. Accordingly, though it may seem to have slept in the mean season, still in David we find the doctrine of a Redeemer to come, bursting out afresh with a clearness for which we are not prepared, so that in the Psalms we have Him,—shadowed forth?—that were a faint word; vividly expressed, I would rather say, in the language of history more than of prophecy; and his godhead and his manhood, his glory at his Father's right hand, and his humiliation upon earth as the very outcast of the people; his betrayal; his sufferings; the piercing of his side; the bone unbroken; the bitter draught; the raffle for his garment; the scoff of the by-stander; the tomb of the rich man made his own; the triumphant resurrection of his body ere it should see corruption; these and many other particulars, of a minuteness quite extraordinary, though known but in part and under-

stood but in part, still serve to swell the cry which rolls beneath the vault of time, that the Emmanuel is on his way. Generations pass on, and then come the prophets, properly so called, and they took up their parables, and again spake what had been uttered of old, and added many other like words, such as were yet wanting to complete the development of this great mystery; and the miraculous conception of the Redeemer; and the village that was to be his birth-place; and the bitter tears to be shed in Bethlehem for the children that were to perish at his coming; and the voice of the forerunner who was to prepare his path; and his own habitual walking by the way of the sea of Galilee; and his being rejected of men; and the tidings which he should preach, and the very manner in which he should deliver them, nor that the manner of the times; and the deafness of

his hearers ; and the miracles which he was to work ; and his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, and the animal on which he should ride ; and the dispersion of his disciples when the master should be smitten ; and the blows and the spitting of his merciless mockers ; and the number of silver pieces for which he should be sold ; and the potter unto whom they should afterwards be cast ; and the term of years that should elapse before Messiah should be cut off<sup>a</sup> ;—all these prophetic details of the mighty restorer of a ruined race at length to arrive, accumulate, and give an impulse to the fame of the great event, enough to push it through the dark and desolate period of the Jewish annals

<sup>a</sup> Isa. vii. 14.; Micah v. 2.; Jerem. xxxi. 15.; Isa. xl. 3.; ix. 1, 2.; liii. 3.; xi. 2, 3.; xlvi. 1.; vi. 9.; xxxv. 5, 6.; Zech. ix. 9.; xiii. 7.; Isa. l. 6.; Jerem. xi. 13.; Dan. ix.

which now succeeded, a period pregnant with the distresses of Israel, and cheered by no voice from God.

But the sound was gone out into all lands, and the word unto the ends of the world, God having fashioned from the first, and still continuing to fashion secret channels of his own for its propagation. And the early separation of patriarchal households in search of pasture or of a well ; and the sojourn of the chosen people in strange lands ; and the internal commotions of their country which promoted emigration ; and the individual thirst for merchandise and gain which beset the Israelites from the most primitive period of their history ; were all second causes which ministered to the diffusion of this nation of priests, of whom the world was the vast congregation. For we find the sons of Abraham scattered wide and far, how far, who can

say, when even the Lacedemonians, we are told in a passage of the Maccabees<sup>a</sup>, declared themselves to be ‘of the stock of Abraham,’ —and the land of Goshen, settled as it was with Israelites, was a light to lighten the Gentiles of Egypt; and the wonders wrought in Egypt are expressly said to have been for this purpose, that ‘the *Egyptians* may know that I am the Lord;’ and the two nations intermarried, and perhaps ‘the mixed multitude’ which went up with Israel out of Egypt, was in a great measure the offspring of such alliances<sup>b</sup>; and the Ten Tribes, after their captivity by Shalmaneser were absorbed together with the knowledge they possessed, among the nations of the East; and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, as they sat beside the waters of Babylon and thought upon Zion, helped to leaven that heathen city;

<sup>a</sup> 1 Macc. xii. 21. <sup>b</sup> Lev. xxiv. 10. Exod. xii. 38.

for certain of them stood by the king's command in the king's palace expressly that they might 'be taught the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans'<sup>a</sup>; and it was soon perceived that they were wiser than their teachers; and God interposed by visions, whereof the interpretation served to make these his prophets known; and through this channel, it is probable, Cyrus might derive his knowledge of Jehovah, for Him he owned<sup>b</sup>; and many converts appear to have returned with the Jews to their own land, after the captivity, 'a mixed multitude' once more<sup>c</sup>; and on one occasion we find the queen of this same country a Jewess, and its minister describing to his royal master the Jews as 'a people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of the kingdom', and as 'having laws di-

<sup>a</sup> Dan. i. 4.

<sup>b</sup> Ezra i. 2.

<sup>c</sup> Is. xiv. 1.

verse from all people', and as 'refusing to keep the king's laws'; and he, be it remembered, whose territories are thus overrun with these strangers, a monarch who reigned from India even to Æthiopia over a hundred, twenty and seven provinces<sup>a</sup>. And the number of incidents appertaining to patriarchal and Israelitish history, mutilated indeed by tradition, which circulated amongst the heathens, conspire to prove the almost universal intercourse of the Jews with the nations of the earth, particularly when we consider how much more the diffusion of knowledge in those days was the 'fruit of the lips' than in these. And the creation of the world out of chaos; and the formation of man out of the dust of the earth; and the vast stature of the primitive generations of our race; and the sabbatical rest; and the bow in the cloud;

<sup>a</sup> Esther i. 1.

and the bees and honey in the carcass of the lion which Sampson slew ; and the foxes and firebrands ; and the locks of hair which were the secret of that strong man's strength and of Israel's safety ; and the fall of Dagon on the ‘grunsel-edge’, and the forbearance of his worshippers ever after to tread upon the threshold ; and the letter which Uriah bare to Joab, being his own death-warrant ; these and a multitude of other coincidences between sacred and profane literature, which might be alleged, but which it is needless to suggest to this congregation, all argue the intimate intercourse which subsisted between Israel and the heathen inhabitants of the world with whom they were mixed up.

Accordingly, we discover without surprise in the history of the Acts of the Apostles that the earth was at that time literally full of Israelites, persons of that race from every

region under heaven being assembled at Jerusalem at Pentecost; and St. Paul touching at no city in his wide wanderings where he did not encounter a colony of his countrymen. Virtue went out of these sojourners; and through them the nations drank a corrupted draught indeed, but still they drank in a degree of the Spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. For, to take up the review of events from earlier times, I meet with Balaam, a prophet indeed he, but no dweller in the tents or in the territory of the patriarch to whom the promise was confined; no disciple again of Moses or follower of the camp of Israel; but a stranger from Aram, from the mountains of the East; yet stranger as he was to the commonwealth of Israel, still lifting up his voice and saying, ‘I shall see Him but not now, I shall behold

Him but not nigh'. And if I turn to the deserts of Arabia, again I hear the glad tidings ringing in my ears, and the patient man of sorrows takes comfort to himself in this, even in the assurance he feels that 'his Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.' And fragments of the faith perhaps remained in that thirsty land to be gathered up (independently of his direct access to Scripture) by the arch-impostor after many days, whose success is, in some measure, to be imputed to the many revealed truths with which his many fabricated falsehoods were combined, and by which they were qualified and sublimed. But if to the region of Javan we turn, to Chittim and the Isles, still do we detect traces of the same expectation there also; and we

\* Numb. xxiv. 17.

read of a God who first takes part with his leader in the wars of heaven, assisting him to drive the refractory spirits to the bottomless pit; and then, touched with pity for the human race of whom the Supreme has decreed the extinction by withdrawing from them the breath of life, unspheres himself and descends and imparts to them fire from heaven and saves their souls alive: not, however, with impunity, but the cost he has counted, and is prepared to pay it down whatever it might be, such was his love for man<sup>a</sup>; and he is riveted to the rock nothing loth, a spectacle of intense suffering, and is mocked by his executioner, who cries, ‘having foresight for others, hast thou none for thyself, wherewith to speed thine own deliverance’<sup>b</sup>; and still he hangs, confident that however rigorous may be the king of heaven then in the

<sup>a</sup> Prom. Vinc. 101.

<sup>b</sup> 85.

infliction of the bitter sentence, the time would come when he would lay his anger to sleep, and challenge and receive his love<sup>a</sup>. A singular story assuredly and inexplicable, as it should seem, but upon the supposition that a certain, nay that a considerable knowledge of the fall of man, and of the scheme of his future recovery by a Saviour's cross and passion, was abroad in the world by some means or other, disfigured and overlaid though it might be, and that such knowledge was the basis of this—*fable* shall I call it?—of which the scene too, it may be remarked, is laid in the mountains of the East. Or, if I travel still further toward the setting sun, and seek of Rome, whether any herald of his distant approach had reached even unto her, I find the greatest of her poets working up the images of Prophecy transmitted to him

<sup>a</sup> Prom. Vinc. 195—200.

through the mysterious leaves of the sibyl, or by whatever other means, images, of which he knew not indeed the worth, into a birthday compliment; and the child of his friend, who saw the light probably about that very season when ‘unto us a child was born, unto us a son was given,’ is arrayed in glories not his own, strangely misapplied and out of all proportion to him; and with him, the progeny of heaven, (such he is represented<sup>a</sup>) old things are to pass away, and all things to become new; and the months are to march on with unwonted majesty; and an age of iron to cease, and a golden age to dawn upon the universal world; and the air to dispense its incense; and the fields to teem with flowers and flow with milk; and the lion to be at peace with the herd; and the serpent and the venomous herb to die; and all nature to

<sup>a</sup> Virg. Eclog. iv. 7.

be jubilant in the prospect of the good things that were coming upon the earth. But, indeed, for the strength which this rumour of the Messiah to come, had gathered, and the extent of the world over which it had swept, we have a voucher, of whom I need scarcely remind you, in a heathen biographer, a voucher not the less exceptionable because he interprets it of an emperor of Rome; and who tells us that ‘an expectation prevailed throughout all the east, both *ancient* and *uninterrupted*, (these two features are remarkable,) that about this period, Judea was to give birth to such as should govern the world<sup>a</sup>: and in conformity with this account, no sooner did the unusual star show itself in the heavens, than the wise men from that region, alive to the signs of the times which this universal hope had taught them to watch, sped

<sup>a</sup> Sueton. Vesp. § 4.

to Jerusalem; and great was the consternation of Herod at hearing of their errand, for the foreboding was upon him too, and the priests and scribes are sent for in haste, and the question of the Messiah's birth-place is propounded to them; but neither are they taken by surprise, for they also shared in the feverish feeling of the times, that the burden of the prophecies of ages past was at length about to have its issue; and in Bethlehem is he to be born, they answer at a word. And the age-stricken Israelites, trembling upon the limits of life but unwilling to quit it till their eyes had seen their salvation, are now described as 'waiting for the consolation of Israel;' as lingering in the purlieus of the Temple, 'looking for the redemption' that drew nigh—a Simeon and an Anna; and whilst the infant Messiah was yet subject to his parents and his fame slept, or waked but to a

favoured few, the people impatient of longer delay, are ready to rush into the wilderness at the first call of every enterprising stranger who might take advantage of the sentiment of the times; and out would they speed whether to see in him the reed shaken with the wind or the man clothed in soft raiment, the faltering or the fearless adventurer, the Theudas and the Judas of the day<sup>a</sup>. And when John at last appeared, proclaiming himself not indeed the light, but still the witness of the light, and administering a baptism peculiar to himself, ‘the baptism of John,’ so it is emphatically called, neither that of the law which preceded nor that of the Gospel which followed, but a baptism which demanded as its preliminary condition a readiness ‘to believe in him which should come after him’<sup>b</sup>; when John, I say, exacted this avowal of

<sup>a</sup> Acts v. 36, 37.

<sup>b</sup> Acts xix. 4.

his disciples before their initiation, how was he met?—there actually went out to him Jerusalem, (the whole city,) and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan<sup>a</sup>; so that the kingdom of heaven was said to suffer violence, to be taken as it were by force, such were the numbers and such was the zeal of those who thronged about him to make open confession of this popular article of their faith, and enrol themselves in the ranks of the Messiah. And when Jesus began his ministry he found in Samaria, where the people must have grounded their knowledge on the Books of Moses, not only a lively anticipation of his coming, but an extraordinary acquaintance with his true character, as a great teacher, as an universal redeemer; and ‘I know,’ said the woman at

<sup>a</sup> Matt. iii. 5.

the well, ‘that Messias cometh, which is called Christ, and when he is come, he will tell us all things;’ and her fellow-citizens having in their turn, listened to the words which he spake, at once declared, ‘now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ the *Saviour of the World*’<sup>a</sup>. And the vast conflux of Israelites at the Feast of Pentecost, of which I have already spoken, is probably to be regarded as a testimony of the Jews of all countries to their belief that the weeks of Daniel were expired, and that the Messiah was at hand. And the *Greeks* that came up at the Feast of the Passover, not to sacrifice with the Jews, as if members of the church of Moses, but to

<sup>a</sup> John iv. 25. 42. See Horsley’s Sermons, xxiv., xxv., xxvi.

*worship*, give token by the curiosity they discover to see Jesus, that they too were smit by the hope of Israel.<sup>a</sup>

Now such being the progressive working of this expectation of the Christ to come, however confounded and embarrassed (for so it undoubtedly was) by the blindness of ambitious men, by the misunderstanding of prophecies apparently though not really conflicting, and by the alloy which it had contracted in its laborious struggle through Jewish traditions and gentile idolatries; to refuse it a very prominent position in any scheme of scripture history or interpretation, much more to pass it over almost or altogether as an inconsiderable and subordinate feature in it, seems to be, to run counter to the whole current of antiquity, which, as we have seen, sets in towards it strongly and steadily; so

<sup>a</sup> John xii. 20.

strongly and so steadily as to bear him down, I think, who shall venture to stand across its course. For, let the wise man, if he will, attempt to explain the writings of the Old Testament without this master-key, and soon will he find himself in the condition of one who is taught to confess by the mere multiplication of difficulties which impede his advance, that he must have missed his road at the outset; whilst on the other hand let the wayfaring man, though but a fool, take along with him this principle and apply it, and he finds the harmony of the Old and New Testament complete; a Redeemer the presiding spirit of both; and if the glory of the latter house be greater than of the other<sup>a</sup>, it is mainly in this, that the Voice of the Lord God in the flesh, was actually heard walking within its walls.

<sup>a</sup> Hag. ii. 9.

A Being then, whose nature, character, purpose in visiting this lower world, are declared with an emphasis so extraordinary; whose advent appears to be the great crisis with which the womb of time was labouring for four thousand years; the desire of the patriarch; the substance of the law; the burden of prophecy; the framework of mythology itself; could be no common being; his work nothing less than a strange work<sup>a</sup>; and the force of this argument, the cumulative testimony of so many ages as it were, the comprehensive testimony of so many incidents, to the majesty of a Saviour, may well arrest the attention of those who choose to see in Jesus nothing but a created being, a wise teacher, a spotless example, an heroic martyr; and induce them to review a conclusion which seems so ill to correspond with

<sup>a</sup> Isaiah xxviii. 21.

the long and loud note of preparation with which his coming was announced ; and this the more, seeing that when the day of speculation is gone by, and the pride of disputation done with, and such persons feel themselves entering in earnest into the valley of the shadow, and look about them for their staff on which to lean, they will not find it, I fear, in such a Messiah as they have fashioned for themselves ; but rather in one, who was with God before the world was and was God, and who nevertheless made himself lower than the angels, and for their sake took upon himself the form of a servant, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Upon such a Being may they lean with confidence ; upon Him may they call with full assurance of faith, even then when the remembrance of sin past and the apprehension of judgment to come overwhelm

them, and Him entreat by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, by his precious death and burial, by his glorious resurrection and ascension, to forgive and to forget.

## LECTURE II.

## THE CASE OF ABRAHAM CONSIDERED.

JOHN VIII. 56.

*Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.*

‘THE Old Testament is not contrary to the New, for both in the Old and New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises.’

Such is the language of the Seventh Article of our Church, and Scripture confirms it. I will confine what I have to say upon this subject on the present occasion to the single case of Abraham; and I think it will appear that his character and conduct cannot be ex-

plained satisfactorily on any other principle, than upon the prospect of the Messiah to come greatly influencing him—that this promise seen afar off was a very leading motive with him—that the mere worldly and temporal advantages held out to him, for such were held out, were by no means his first object—that an object they were, but not the principal and paramount object which some have thought proper to make them—that as the end of our faith is, Christ who is come, so the end of the faith of the patriarchs was, Christ who was to come; our faith having a reference to things past, theirs to things future—that either dispensation was calculated to prove the dispositions of men equally well—that either would present the same hopes, the same difficulties, the same opportunities for the display and exercise of patience, of trust, of humility,—and

that under both dispensations were to be found infidels and sceptics, and under both, firm and faithful believers in Christ.

I. The whole world was sinking fast into idolatry, and there was a danger that all knowledge of the true God should expire, when God raised up for Himself a great reformer, as he has done several times since, who should still keep his name alive, and spread it again amongst the inhabitants of the earth. Abraham was the man of the Almighty's choice. In order therefore to estrange him at once from the contamination of idolatrous relations, He was pleased to give him a command to remove himself from amongst them. I say from idolatrous relations, for in the Book of Joshua we read, 'And Joshua said unto all the people, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood, in old

time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor, and they *served other gods*<sup>a</sup>. God therefore determined to take Abraham from amongst them to be a servant of his own. The very outset stamps the whole transaction as the beginning not of a civil, but of a *religious* reformation of the world.

II. The inducements proposed to Abraham, in order to lead him away from this dangerous neighbourhood, correspond with such an object : they are temporal inducements in part, but subordinate to others of a higher and more heavenly nature. ‘Get thee out of thy country’ (such are the words of the Almighty,) ‘and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee ; and I will make of thee a *great nation*, and I will bless thee, and make thy

<sup>a</sup> Josh. xxiv. 2.

name great, and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee, and in thee shall *all the families of the earth be blessed*<sup>a</sup>. The terms are repeated in another passage of Abraham's life, rather more at full; 'by myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore, and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and *in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*',<sup>b</sup>. That a numerous progeny, and the possession of a portion of the earth wherein they were to dwell, was a part of this promise, is clear; it was the temporal part; for godliness was then, as it is still, made profitable for the life which now is, as well as for that which is to come;

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xii. 3.

<sup>b</sup> Gen. xxii. 16—18.

though neither was such profit then, nor ought it to be now, the leading principle. But it is no less clear, that there was another and a greater promise behind; even that in Abraham '*all the families of the earth were to be blessed*', or, as it is again expressed, that, '*in his seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed*';—not one family, as his own, for instance; not one nation, as the nation that might spring from him; but all the families, and all the nations of the earth,—a blessing co-extensive with mankind itself; co-extensive with the curse under which the world lay; and of which Abraham must have been aware, as well as of the gracious intentions which God had intimated when it was inflicted, of one day taking it off by means of the seed of the woman,—a blessing therefore which Abraham might well suppose had a

reference to that curse. Nor is this a gratuitous presumption of my own. The narrative in this part of the Bible is indeed very brief, consisting rather of hints than of explanations in detail ; and therefore the extent of the communications which the Almighty made to Abraham or to the other patriarchs, is not perhaps to be collected from the literal history, or be collected from it but very imperfectly ; but what is the commentary upon the terms of this promise to Abraham of those who are the safest commentators of all ? I mean, of the saints, of the apostles, of Christ himself ? Let these be our critics. When Mary, convinced by the angel that she was about to become the mother of the Messiah, uttered her jubilant hymn, these were the words ; ‘ He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spake to

our fathers, to *Abraham* and to his seed for ever<sup>a</sup>; and shortly after, Zacharias, in his hymn to the nativity, for such it may be reckoned, again alludes to the fulfilment of the ‘oath which God sware to our father, *Abraham*’<sup>b</sup>. ‘Your father, *Abraham*’, says Jesus to the Jews, ‘rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad’<sup>c</sup>. At this the Jews stumbled, as others have stumbled at the same supposition since, namely, that the patriarchs possessed a knowledge of the Messiah to come; but Jesus is nevertheless true to his first asseveration, and repeats (and with those emphatic words which so often usher in his weightiest sayings,) ‘*Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.*’ Here then we have Jesus himself for a witness that he had existed before the foundation of the world, and that of his

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 54.      <sup>b</sup> Ib. v. 73.      <sup>c</sup> John viii. 56.

existence and office Abraham had been told, and rejoiced at the tidings. They therefore are not to be heard, again I exclaim, who feign that the old fathers did look only or chiefly for transitory promises.

III. But St. Paul, that chosen vessel of God who spake or explained his lively oracles,—St. Paul is an interpreter of the terms of the promise made by God to Abraham, still more in point, if possible, because he actually is engaged in discussing those terms with his blinded countrymen, who could not or would not see their spiritual nature and meaning. ‘The scripture’, saith he, ‘foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the GOSPEL unto Abraham, saying in thee *shall all nations be blessed*’<sup>1</sup>. The expression is very remarkable, and such as nothing can

\* Gal. iii. 8. προευηγγελίσατο τῷ Αβραὰμ.

evade. God preaches, it seems, not the mere possession of a kingdom which is of this world, but the GOSPEL unto Abraham, when he imparts to him the promises,—the Gospel,—the good tidings of great joy that shall be to all mankind, that unto them shall be born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. It is not upon a single phrase, however remarkable, that I build, though indeed it again occurs in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, (v. 2.) and in the same sense. I catch not at a word ; such reasoning in such a cause I disdain : but the drift of the Apostle's argument admits of no interpretation but one. The Galatians had been seduced from a faith in Christ to a reliance upon the law for salvation. Ye know not the law, says the Apostle: the law only serves to condemn, and by its condemnation to drive you to that faith in a Redeemer which was

imparted to Abraham; he himself being saved by faith, before the law ; and his followers since the law being saved by it too ; for the publication of the law in the mean season did not supersede this faith, but rather confirmed it, by opening men's eyes to their need of such a refuge. Neither does the Apostle rest here, but still proceeds to argue the point,—the import of this very promise we are considering,—in yet more ample detail. ‘To Abraham and to his seed,’ he continues, ‘were the promises made’; the terms being, ‘in *thy* seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’ And who might this seed be? Was it in general the progeny of Abraham who should multiply exceedingly and settle and possess a country: was this, the prosperity of that favoured people, the blessing announced? That, argues the Apostle, would be a strange interpretation of the divine co-

venant, for he saith not in seeds, as of many, ‘but in thy seed, *which is Christ.*’ Christ therefore was the blessing. And on whom was it to be conferred? On the children of Abraham according to the flesh, the settlers in Canaan? That, contends the Apostle, is much too narrow a limit for its operation, seeing that the terms of the promise were, ‘in thy seed shall *all the nations of the earth* be blessed.’ No, he continues, ‘the blessing of Abraham was to come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ,’ ‘all that were of faith being the children of Abraham’, whether of the circumcision or uncircumcision.

IV. Thus far has my argument been built on the Epistle to the Galatians. The same view of this great question is presented to us again in the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>2</sup>; for there was some difficulty in disabusing the

<sup>2</sup> Hebr. xi.

Jews of the low and inadequate notions which they entertained of the meaning of their own Scriptures,—the veil was upon their hearts when Moses was read—‘had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me, *for he wrote of me*’, is our Lord’s own testimony<sup>a</sup>. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, I say, Abraham is in like manner set forth as aware of the great part he was playing in the destinies of the world, the religious destinies; as aware, that he was not migrating from the east, a hardy and enterprising adventurer, his ambition earthly, his prospect pent within the hills of Canaan; but as lifting up his eyes above those hills from whence came his help; as dwelling contentedly in *tabernacles* with Isaac and Jacob, not so much as caring to build a city which had foundations, leaving that to those who might come

<sup>a</sup> John v. 46.

after him, but for his part confessing that he was—the aspiring leader of a ‘nomadic tribe’ upon the earth<sup>a</sup>? I read not so, but ‘a stranger and pilgrim upon it’<sup>b</sup>—a stranger and pilgrim stedfastly looking for a city whose builder was God. With these happy hopes he died, an old man and full of years, not ‘having received the promises’, not having been permitted to wait in the flesh for the consolation of Israel; but still having been permitted to see those promises afar off, and to be persuaded of them, and to embrace them; in faith he was gathered to his people<sup>c</sup>; gathered to them, not his bones to their bones, as the low system of interpretation against which I am contending, would have it<sup>d</sup>; for the bones of his fathers were far away be-

<sup>a</sup> Hist. of the Jews, vol. I. p. 8.    <sup>b</sup> Hebr. xi. 15.

<sup>c</sup> Gen. xxv. 8. Hebr. xi. 13.

<sup>d</sup> Hist. of the Jews, vol. I. p. 21.

yond the river Euphrates, whilst his own were to repose in the cave which he had bought at Machpelah ; gathered to them, as Moses at his death was said to ‘ sleep with his fathers ’, howbeit he was actually buried in a valley of Moab, nobody knowing where<sup>a</sup>; gathered to them, as David was said at his death to ‘ sleep with his fathers ’<sup>b</sup>, though it was in Jerusalem and not in Bethlehem that his sepulchre was made ; his spirit therefore gathered to the spirits of his kindred who had gone before him, to rejoice with them that their pilgrimage was done. ‘ They then are not to be heard who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises.’

V. Now supported by such authority, even that of St. Paul and of Jesus himself, for the sense in which Abraham understood the promises of God, let us consider a few of the cir-

<sup>a</sup> Deut. xxxi. 16. xxxiv. 6.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Kings ii. 10.

cumstances of his actual history, and see whether they do not afford internal evidence for such a sense.

Abraham left his country, his kindred, and his father's house, to go to a distant and unknown land. Surely this was a sacrifice and a great one, which the prospect of temporal blessings for his posterity, and that a very remote prospect, was scarcely inducement enough to make him submit to with cheerfulness. The country where he dwelt already was fat and fertile; as the condition of Laban's family in later days proves; abundant in pasturage, in water, in cattle, in camels, and in sheep. Had it been a more barren land, it must by this time have been regarded, though not the original settlement, as the land of his fathers. He had spent in it the best part of his life; and at the age of seventy-five, even at a period when men

were more robust, the spirit of adventure in Abraham must have been waxing feeble. To leave it therefore, under the circumstances in which he left it, the temporal circumstances I mean, was a sacrifice. It is represented as such in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and is there numbered amongst other instances of the triumph of faith over nature,— ‘By faith, Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance *obeyed, and he went out not knowing whither he went*’<sup>a</sup>. He goes from a scene of plenty. He is ushered into Canaan and finds a grievous famine in the land, so that he is compelled to betake himself with his family to Egypt. This is an unpropitious outset. But his purposes are not hereby shaken, for we find in him no longing after the flesh pots of Haran, no hint

<sup>a</sup> Hebr. xi. 8.

of a return to the land he had left. Nay in later times when it was actually proposed by his steward with a view to Isaac's marriage, he expressly says, ‘beware that thou bring not my son thither again’<sup>a</sup>. The proposal was natural enough on the part of the servant, a stranger of Damascus, who was guided by temporal considerations only, and saw that his master had no property in this land of his sojourn, nor prospect of property in it, and where in fact his descendants could not call one rood their own, except the field of Hebron, for four hundred years to come<sup>b</sup>. It was natural for him to start such a proposal; but Abraham was guided by other and higher considerations than his. He felt indeed that by returning he should injure the earthly prosperity of his remote descendants who were still, he was convinced, one

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xxiv. 6.

<sup>b</sup> Acts vii. 5.

day to have that land in possession, but he had higher views than even this; he felt that by so doing he should also forfeit the Blessing, the more than earthly Blessing, in store for him and his, for that he would be flinching from the orders of his God. This too I speak with that same Epistle for my warrant—‘ Truly if they, the Fathers of Israel, had been mindful of the country from whence they came out, *they might have had opportunity to have returned*; but now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city’<sup>a</sup>. The hopes of the father of the faithful therefore were not to be destroyed by earthly disappointments because they were not set on earth.

VI. Five and twenty years pass away,

<sup>a</sup> Hebr. xi. 16.

and still Abraham has no child, at least none on whom the promise is settled ; and to swell his numbers by such as did not inherit the promise, though it might have answered the ends of a mere worldly-minded leader, was no object with him. Such persons indeed he dismissed from him<sup>a</sup>. Five and twenty years had passed away, and Sarah is old and he is old also. What would have been the feelings, what the vexation and disquietude of an ambitious chieftain, had such he been, had the mere headship of a clan been his heart's desire, to see the best of his days thus gone, and he still alone ! The promise which had brought him forth from his country broken, as he might think, or so tardily fulfilled as to be too late to yield any satisfaction to him ! Yet clear as it now was that he was never to be the actual leader of

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xxv. 4, 5, 6.

a powerful tribe, he was not cast down; nay, when the son, the single child was born to him in his old age, he was more than content with the immediate fulfilment of God's promise, because in that son he beheld the transmitter of the blessing of all the nations of the earth; the father, it might be, of the inheritors of Canaan, but much more the father of Him by whom the heavenly Canaan was to be peopled with souls, who but for him would have been lost; of Him, concerning whom Sarah prophesied, however under a *figure*, saying, 'God hath made me to *laugh*, so that all that hear will *laugh* with me'; and in the repeated allusions which we find to the laughter of Abraham, and to the laughter of Sarah, trivial as the incident seems, and the conspicuous position assigned to it in the history of an event otherwise brief enough; we are taught to seek for that

figure: and accordingly in the very name of Isaac, imposed as it was by God himself, which is, being interpreted, he, or it, shall *laugh*, the family of Abraham beheld the joy of the whole earth advancing, and so the patriarch we are told ‘*rejoiced* to see that day, and he saw it and was *glad*’. From all this history I discover more in Abraham than the ambitious chieftain of a wandering clan, other hopes and other consolations than such as were bounded by the land-marks of Canaan.

VII. But this son, this only son is to be slain. What did Abraham read in this command? The downfal of his earthly hopes? The great nation strangled in the cradle? And did he resist? So might the ambitious leader have read, and so done. Or, did he decipher in it more or less distinctly, the Saviour to be offered up in the fulness of

time; Mount Calvary in Mount Moriah (for they were the same); the Cross borne by that Saviour in the wood borne by that son, that only son; the true paschal Lamb of God which He would *provide* for Himself in due season, in that Lamb which God (as Abraham said) was providing for Himself then; the spontaneous sacrifice of himself which Jesus made none compelling, in the like sacrifice to which Isaac was prepared to submit, none being at hand who had power to exact it, (for he was a youth able to bear his burden up the mountain, perhaps of the very age of our Lord at his passion, in his three and thirtieth year<sup>a</sup>; his father who bound him an aged man, being an hundred years old when Isaac was born;) the substitution for a while of animal sacrifices, for that of

<sup>a</sup> Lightfoot, Vol. I. p. 13. fol. ed. Josephus however makes Isaac then five and twenty.

the great victim himself, in the substitution of the ram caught by the horns, for the child of his body? Did he trace, however faintly, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, in the assurance he felt that though he should slay Isaac, God would raise him from the dead, seeing that he had given him to him as it were from the dead at first?<sup>a</sup> Did he know in part and prophesy in part, even as David did at a later period, (howbeit there is no express revelation of this great mystery upon record between the time of Abraham and of David,) that God ‘would not leave His soul in hell, neither suffer his Holy One to see corruption’? How much or how little of this the patriarch could read in the picture before him, it is not possible to say; but the transaction is too singular; too full of close and lively reference to the great

<sup>a</sup> Hebr. xi. 19.

scene afterwards enacted on this selfsame spot; and I will add, too much in accordance with the method of communicating his revelations to the world which the Almighty was wont to adopt in those days, to allow us to believe that he saw in it no meaning at all beyond the literal one. It was too much of a piece with the work of that superintending hand which caused the skirt of Samuel's mantle to rend when it was to be signified to Saul that his kingdom was to be rent from him<sup>a</sup>; which directed the prophet Ahijah to catch the new garment on Jero-boam and ‘rend it in twelve pieces, and give ten pieces to him’, when he meant to tell him that God would ‘rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give ten tribes to him’<sup>b</sup>; which in later times wrought on Agabus, when he took Paul’s girdle and

<sup>a</sup> 1 Sam. xv. 27.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Kings xi. 31.

bound his own hands and feet with it, and said, ‘Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle’<sup>a</sup>. Like these, the sacrifice of Isaac seems to have been a prophetic action, designed by God to unfold his purposes more fully; a living book in which his will was written; a rehearsal, as it were, of the atonement on the Cross; so that I still behold in Abraham the friend of God; the mortal man to whom, so to speak, the Almighty gave his confidence; from whom He would not hide the thing that He would do; I see in him this, rather than the enterprising wanderer who sought to establish a name for himself among the nations, leaving behind him a numerous and powerful posterity; I see him in a position which relates more to the next world than to this; more to the

<sup>a</sup> Acts xxi. 11.

heavenly than to the earthly Canaan ; more to Jesus than to Joshua.

VIII. Nor is this all. Abraham, now stricken in age, is desirous of finding a wife for Isaac before he dies. Now had he been the ambitious chief, had he longed for the possession of Canaan with any very intense desire,—nay, had he been the worldling only,—it would have been natural for him to seek a match for his son in some daughter of a prince of that country, as the profane Esau did in the next generation, and thus secure to himself a better footing there by a politic alliance. A numerous posterity, if that were all, might have sprung from such a marriage, as well as from any other ; Esau had a very numerous posterity, and was a very powerful leader : but, on the contrary, a wife of the daughters of Canaan for Isaac is what Abraham cannot away with. He feels on this

subject as Rebekah felt after him, on an occasion very similar, that if such a calamity befel him, what good would his life do him? his heart's desire and prayer was, that his blood might not be mixed with that of idolaters; that he might run no risk of forfeiting the promise of his giving birth to the Messiah, by polluting the channel through which he was to come. This was at the bottom of the solemn oath which he took of Eliezer his servant, 'an oath by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that he would not take a wife unto his son of the daughters of the Canaanites'<sup>a</sup>, but that he would go for one unto his country and to his kindred; not because he should thereby strengthen his hands, far from it, but because it was a country and kindred where, if the worship of the true God was not pure, it was not

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xxiv. 3.

utterly polluted. For this great promise, like most of God's promises, was probably conditional, and so understood; and might have been revoked if the family of Abraham had lapsed into idolatry; even as the priesthood, though given by God to the house of Eli, as it seemed, for ever, was nevertheless transferred to another house, when Eli's sons became too wicked to admit of its continuing any longer in their line<sup>a</sup>. And as much as this may indeed be thought implied in the reason which God is pleased to assign on another occasion for giving Abraham a revelation of his will, 'for I know him,' saith the Lord, 'that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that *the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him*'<sup>b</sup>;

<sup>a</sup> 1 Sam. ii. 30.

<sup>b</sup> Gen. xviii. 19.

as though, under other circumstances, the promise might even yet be forfeited. Upon this point, therefore, Abraham was more than usually alive, when he felt his end approaching, and thought the care of his family and the nursing of his high hopes were about to devolve upon Eliezer his steward.

Now surely this is not the conduct of an ambitious but of a religious man ; of a man who, though he was living in a country where he had no inheritance, ‘no not so much as to set his foot on’ ; a sojourner only, and a dweller in tents ; the Canaanite being then in the land ; who would have been glad, no doubt, to set up his rest there with all convenient speed, had it been lawful ; took no steps to do so, when, as many might have thought, a fair opportunity was offered, at the hazard, however, of corrupting the *religion* of his house, but counted it better to ally

himself with the people of God, impolitic though it might seem, than enjoy the possessions of Canaan, however prematurely. Again then must I declare with our Articles, that ‘they are not to be heard which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises’, and with our Homilies, that those Fathers ‘had the *Christian* faith. And although they were not named Christian men, yet was it a *Christian* faith that they had; for they looked for all benefits of God the Father through the merits of his Son, Jesus Christ, as we do now; this difference being between them and us; for they looked when Christ should come, and we be in the time when he is come. Therefore, saith Augustin, the time is altered and changed, but not the faith.’<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Hom. of Faith, Part II. p. 42. See also Hooker’s Discourse on Justification, § 23.

That Saviour, therefore, whom they bent forward with an eager and anxious eye to behold through the distant future, we on whom the ends of the world are come, have the privilege of turning back to contemplate in the past, and of seeing still more clearly. ‘That angel of God which went before them hath removed, and is gone behind us’<sup>a</sup>. If they then who beheld Him but not nigh, were thereby stirred up to heavenly hopes, and reckoned the things of this world as things having no foundation, and an inheritance in this world as only a poor prize to pursue, how much more ought we, who have that Saviour very nigh to us, his example to improve us, his precepts to guide us, his promises to encourage us, his Spirit to enlighten and comfort us; how much more, I say, ought we to have our affections drawn up to

<sup>a</sup> Exod. xiv. 19.

that better and more enduring inheritance  
whither He is gone before, to prepare for us,  
if we will follow him, a joyful home.

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## LECTURE III.

THE CASE OF JACOB AND ESAU CONSIDERED.

HEBREWS XI. 20.

*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*

THE great principle for which I contended, as affording the true solution of much of the writings of the Old Testament, in my first Lecture, and which I applied to the particular case of Abraham in my last, I again advance, in explanation of another history hard to be understood; a history which, like that of Abraham, has been placed in a false position by reason of this principle having been lost sight of, and which I will now endeavour to restore to its own.

I repeat, then, that in the early ages of the world, the great thing to which all godly families looked was the *promise*, and not so

much to that part of it (for it was twofold) which was temporal, ‘I will make of thee a great nation’, as to that part of it which was spiritual, ‘in thy *seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed’; that the prevalence of this latter expectation furnishes the only satisfactory clue to much of the Mosaic records; and that he who rejects it, or denies to it its proper place, making it wait upon that portion of the promise which relates to a numerous posterity and the possession of Canaan, as the main hope of Israel, will eventually find himself at a loss in his scheme of interpretation; his principle proving in the use insufficient and impracticable; and himself at length constrained, if he be candid, to confess, that, refusing what would have been ‘a lantern unto his feet’, he has lost his way. If any passage in the whole patriarchal history can extort such a confession, it is surely this

of Jacob and Esau. Read it without a constant reference to the prevailing expectation of a Messiah, which has been of late attempted<sup>a</sup>, and it is as an hedge of thorns, full of embarrassments, from which there is no escape. Read it with an eye intent upon this object of Israel's desire and prayer, and the way is made comparatively plain. Now, as on the one hand, a scheme of interpretation cannot be correct, which sets our own moral instincts in opposition to God's decrees; which leads us to curse those whom He hath not altogether cursed, and to bless him whom He hath by no means blessed; and such is the case here under the one supposition:—so has a principle, which serves to guide us through this painful and perplexing labyrinth, which is the case under the other supposition, much to plead in its behalf; as that key can

<sup>a</sup> History of the Jews.

scarcely fail of being the right, it may be supposed, which serves to open a lock, whereof the wards are more than commonly intricate.

I. Now in the first place, the circumstances attending the birth of Jacob and Esau appear to point to the principle of interpretation which I maintain. Rebekah ‘goes to inquire of the Lord’ touching her future offspring. Having been herself chosen by express token from God for the wife of Isaac; having abandoned her own country at a word, rejoicing in the hope that all generations were to call her blessed; to God, who has so far sped her, she repairs on this occasion, to learn his purposes concerning the fruit of her womb. God declares that she shall give birth to two manner of people, and that the elder shall serve the younger. But were the fortunes of the two chiefly to differ in temporal pos-

sessions and in temporal power? were their dispositions to be respectively marked by a greater or less degree of ‘fitness’ in the parties for founding ‘an united and settled people’, and no more?\* St. Paul says not so. He, when debating the call of the Gentiles and the rejection of the Jews; when overthrowing all exclusive claim of his countrymen to the gospel as the children of Abraham; and when ascribing the whole scheme of election and reprobation to God’s good pleasure; rests his argument very principally upon the case of Jacob and Esau,—a case, therefore, which he must have regarded as analogous to the one before him; and accordingly a case of spiritual rather than of temporal privilege. ‘When Rebekah’, says the Apostle, ‘had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac,—for the children, being not yet

\* History of the Jews, Vol. I. p. 24.

born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,—it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger: as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then', he continues, 'is there unrighteousness in God? God forbid. For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion; so that it is not of him that willeth' (of Isaac, who willed to bless Esau,) 'nor of him that runneth', (of Esau, who ran to fetch venison,) 'but of God that *sheweth mercy*.'<sup>a</sup>

Now without pushing our inquiry to a point of doubtful disputation, or presuming to say what were the spiritual advantages attendant upon giving birth to the Messiah,

<sup>a</sup> Rom. ix. 10.

or what the spiritual draw-backs to which they were subjected, whose line was excluded from that office of high honour ; this we may safely affirm, that whilst the promise to Jacob is supposed to involve, as its main consideration, the recovery of man from the effects of the fall by a Redeemer to spring from him in the flesh, we may understand the Apostle when he calls it a promise of *mercy*; but that the term would seem strangely misapplied, if the matter in question had been merely an affair of property, of population and acres, and whether of the twain born of Rebekah should have the good fortune to succeed to it.

II. Again :—if the predominant idea with respect to the blessing had been the temporal advantages which were to accrue from it, the numerous posterity, the fair possessions, the cities built with hands, the act of be-

queathing this prospective inheritance to a child, would have been, one should imagine, altogether a *civil* act; the mere making of a will; a simple affair of contingent property, such as of mines and minerals, which a testator transmits to his descendants, in the hope that it will come to him after many days. But such is not the character of this act, as we see it at the hands of the patriarchs. The bequeathing of the promise is with them not a civil, but strictly a *religious* act. In the instance before us, Isaac was to complete it ‘before the Lord’; an expression which, in the Levitical Law, has always a reference (and it occurs very often) to a holy place, usually to the tabernacle, and some such signification must attach to it here. Neither is it for a feast only, I apprehend, that Esau is sent in search of venison, but for a feast upon a *sacrifice*; a peace-offering,

whereof part was given to God, and part was consumed by the worshipper; a purpose, therefore, which God might well be supposed to forward; and so Jacob replies to Isaac's inquiry, 'How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?' 'because the Lord thy God brought it to me': brought it to him, even as God had provided for himself a ram for an offering on another occasion. Moreover, Jacob is now arrayed in the *goodly raiment* of the first-born, who was by right of birth the priest; raiment laid up; kept in the house; perhaps the house of God, the Beth-el of the encampment; fragrant with the odour of incense, for the smell of it was as the smell of a field which the Lord had blessed, blessed with aromatic fruits and flowers;—raiment, in short, appropriated to holy purposes and holy seasons. Nay more. In the review of this part of the patriarchal

story which is taken in the Epistle to the Hebrews, this act is represented as an act of *faith* in Isaac : ‘by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.’ And the same act, in the case of Jacob, when it became his turn to convey the blessing to others after him, is expressly recorded as an act of positive *devotion*, (the very thing which I am endeavouring to prove,) for it is said, that ‘when he was a dying, he blessed both the sons of Joseph, and *worshipped*.’<sup>a</sup> Now I can understand all these circumstances; the approach to the presence of the Lord ; the oblation ; the ministering priest ; the prostration of the patriarch ; when I consider him as consigning to his son the hope of a redemption from the curse of the fatal fall : but I do not see how they appertain with the same propriety to the making of a will and

<sup>a</sup> Hebr. xi. 21.

the conveyance of an estate. Hitherto, then, the promise of a Messiah seems to be the uppermost thought in the minds of all the parties concerned in this remarkable transaction.

III. We have seen the preparation for the blessing. What are the terms in which it is conveyed? ‘Let people’ (the word is strictly in the plural number, implying more than one people,) ‘let people serve thee, and nations bow down unto thee.’ Not, surely, that the world was to stoop before Jacob individually, a plain man and a dweller in tents; nor yet that it was to stoop before him, as the type of a powerful and populous empire; for in this sense Esau was destined to be far above him; his remote descendants extending their name and dominion over regions vastly wider than those which ever acknowledged the sceptre of Judah: but to stoop before him, as

having in his loins the Child hereafter to be born among men, at whose name every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth. This blessing Isaac repeats in terms somewhat different, when Jacob takes leave of him for Padan-Aram: ‘And God Almighty bless thee’, says the old man at parting, ‘and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people’<sup>a</sup>, the word being still plural; a phrase which, however it might apply to Abraham, in whose loins were many nations, did not apply to Jacob in its literal sense, to whom none could trace but the single nation of the Jews; and for which, therefore, as it must be taken in a figurative sense, it would be better to substitute the translation of the Septuagint, and read, as the text also strictly authorizes, ‘that thou mayest be for

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xxviii. 3.

a gathering of the nations.'<sup>a</sup> Then are our thoughts conducted instinctively, and in no rabbinical spirit of interpretation beyond what is meet, to Him who would have '*gathered* Jerusalem, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings',—to Him, who declared, (in words still more to our present purpose,) 'he that *gathereth* not with me, scattereth.'<sup>b</sup> The terms therefore of the blessing, as delivered by Isaac, still imply the expectation of the Messiah.

III. But were this doubtful, the precept of that Patriarch to his son touching his marriage, a precept which accompanies the blessing would remove the doubt—the preservation of the promise in its due line seeming to be contingent on the purity of such alliance—for we read in Genesis, 'that as Isaac

<sup>a</sup> See Horsley, Serm. XXVI.

<sup>b</sup> Matt. xii. 30.

blessed Jacob, he gave him a charge saying, thou shalt not take a wife of the *daughters of Canaan*'. The blessing and the injunction go together. And it may be further observed that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Esau is represented as a *profane* person who forfeited the blessing, he is also represented as a *fornicator*<sup>a</sup>, in reference probably to his connection with the heathen daughters of Heth. Accordingly Jacob is despatched to Padan-Aram not merely in order that he may escape his brother's anger, but also in order that he may take unto himself a wife of his father's house, and avoid the danger of a match with an idolatress of Canaan. Still I detect in every step of this history as it advances, the predominance of a *religious* principle; a regard to keeping the channel in which the Messiah is to pass

<sup>a</sup> Hebr. xii. 16.

clean and undefiled ; a principle, far higher in its nature than a worldling's hope, his being of the earth, earthy, this being from above.

IV. I proceed, and accompany Jacob in his flight, and forthwith I find Almighty God vouchsafing him an open vision. Let us see how this incident bears upon the question before us. Let the intrigue of Rebekah and her son have had for its object the possession of Canaan only ; and here is that son, a triumphant supplanter, a crafty and covetous usurper, who had directed his wit to the circumvention of his own twin brother, reeking from his perfidy, actually favoured by a friendly visit from the God of his Fathers ! A strange anomaly ! Yet if the principle which I adopt as the key to the whole transaction be suppressed, I know not where we are to look for that extenuation of

Jacob's guilt which could account for such an apparition of divine goodness at such a moment. Yet such extenuation we seem to want in order to reconcile the present interposition of God and the recent transgression of Jacob together. But if I discover in Jacob a person smit with the immense desire of the Messiah—conscious that he was the channel by which of right that Messiah was to come, the oracle of God having so declared before his birth, younger brother though he was; even as Seth had already been chosen for it before Cain or Abel the elder, and Shem before Japhet again the elder, and Isaac before Ishmael—if I discover in him a man so far faithful to this high hope as to burn for its fulfilment with a vehemence passing all bound or barrier, and so far faithless in God's providence as to fear that its fulfilment was in jeopardy even in spite of God's assurance to

the contrary—then I see in him a mixed character, whom God, who discriminates and dissects a case of morals however complicated, might well both praise and punish; praise for his faith in Christ; punish for his unrighteous manner of proving it; comfort, inasmuch as he was a stedfast believer, Christian I had almost said, by a re-assurance of that the first passion of his heart; chastise, by a sentence of present banishment and continued hard labour for twice seven years, inasmuch as he was a false deceiver, a doer of evil that good indeed might come, but a doer of evil still—and I find the dispensation on the whole accord with that of later times, when Jesus himself forgave the woman whose sins were many because ‘she *loved much.*’

V. But if I turn to the vision itself I find it confirm the view I have taken; a view, be it remembered, of which the

features are these, that the extenuation of Jacob's guilt in God's eyes arose out of his desire of the Messiah which impelled him to it, and which now so far pleaded Jacob's cause with God, not indeed as to induce Him to remit the punishment which He had awarded to it, but to set the heart of the transgressor at ease that his sin should not cut him off from his hope. Had the ladder then no meaning, resting as it did upon the earth and reaching unto the heaven, itself the way between man and his Maker? Was there here no allegory, when our Lord actually takes it to himself, saying unto Nathanael, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending *upon the Son of Man*'<sup>a</sup>? Was this 'the *Gate* of heaven', and yet spake it nothing of Him

<sup>a</sup> John i. 51.

who said, ‘I am the *Door*?’ There may indeed be those who regard these coincidences and others like to them as merely accidental, puffed into importance by the dreamer of dreams in theology; yet such coincidences are far too numerous to be so explained away; and a strong body of evidence for the truth both of the Old Testament and of the New might, I am persuaded, be constructed out of a subordinate class of types and antitypes such as these here touched upon, with which the Scriptures are thickly strewed; trivial apparently in themselves; not exhibited in any obvious relation to each other; subtle threads, as it were, by which the two Revelations are knit together as a whole, too delicate to be detected at first sight; so that in dealing carefully with the sacred writings we cannot fail to be impressed with a feeling that there is often ac-

cording to Ezekiel's phrase 'a wheel in the midst of a wheel'<sup>a</sup>, howbeit ours may not be the gift to draw it out; and that without controversy great is the mystery of Godliness. But whatever may be thought of the allegory of this vision, though I know not how there can be two opinions upon it, applied as it is to himself by our Lord, still the words sounded in the ears of Jacob as he rested his head on the pillow of stone spake of the Messiah in a manner not to be mistaken; and 'in thee and in thy *seed*', it is once again declared, 'shall all the families of the earth be blessed'<sup>b</sup>. It saith not in seeds, as of many, but in thy seed, which is Christ. It has been ever a part of the Almighty's plan to dress the wound with his own hand which the sin of his creatures may have compelled him to inflict, and so to prove that

<sup>a</sup> Ezek. x. 10.

<sup>b</sup> Gen. xxviii. 14.

he smote them friendly. Scarcely had Adam fallen when he hastened to publish to him the method he had provided for his recovery, the ruin and the ransom entering Paradise almost together—scarcely had Nathan given utterance to the parable of reproach with which he was charged, against David, when his commission taught him to add, ‘the Lord hath put away thy sin’—and scarcely had Peter denied his Lord and wept bitterly for his offence, ere Jesus, whose ways under the New Testament are the ways of God under the Old, sends him tokens of forgiveness, saying to the women by the mouth of the angel, ‘Go your way, tell the disciples and *Peter* that He goeth before you into Galilee’<sup>a</sup>. And so in like manner, at this forlorn moment, even when Jacob, tenderly nursed as he had been, was driven to face

<sup>a</sup> Mark xvi. 7.

the howling wilderness, without servant, without camel, without tent, to flee as a thief with nothing wherewith to pass Jordan but his staff, ‘a Syrian and ready to perish’, reaping the just retribution of his offence, God did not forget to be gracious nor shut up his loving kindness in displeasure; he did not break the bruised reed, but took pity on the outcast, and assured him at this hour of sorrow and sadness, that perverse as had been his way before him, loudly as it cried to heaven for chastisement, and severe as was that with which it was even then visited, still it had not cancelled God’s favour towards him for ever; it had not provoked Him to withdraw the blessing which he had originally meant for him; but that his own predeterminate counsel should still stand even in spite of his unhallowed exertions to aid and abet it; and that he might still be of

good cheer with respect to his final interest in a Saviour to come, notwithstanding God's just displeasure for a season. Again then, does this principle of interpretation and no other serve to vindicate in the present instance the ways of God to man; to cause mercy and truth to meet together, righteousness and peace to kiss each other.

VI. Once more—adopt any other principle of interpretation than the one I uphold—annihilate the prospect of a Messiah as entering largely into the Promise; and what is to be done with the character of Esau? Here have we a man, kind apparently to his blind and aged parent, for Isaac loved him; reverencing him so far as to check his fury in mid-heat, and suspend his revenge upon his father's son till at least the old man should be no more; composing his decent limbs; burying at last his brother's treachery and

his own threats in his father's grave ; enterprising and high-spirited ; on the whole a man in whom the world, reading Holy Writ with a veil on the heart, sees much to applaud, little to condemn, and every thing to compassionate ; and yet this same man represented in Scripture as ‘*a profane person*’ ; emphatically so called ; as one whom God ‘hated’<sup>a</sup>. Yet if the Promise had been understood to point to temporal things only, what was there to awake the wrath of God against him, in his selling his chance of such inheritance, a remote chance, as he might think, for a morsel of present food, and at a moment, as seems probable, of intense dearth —for though this latter fact is not asserted, we find Isaac in the next chapter breaking up his encampment and moving towards Egypt, because ‘there was a famine in the

<sup>a</sup> Malachi i. 2, 3. Rom. ix. 13.

land'; a coincidence by the way of some value as evidence. Why, I say, should God resent this, foolish bargain, if you will, for that seems all that can be said of it, so bitterly; and visit it not only upon Esau, but upon the kingdom that sprung from him—a dispensation not unusual with God in the days of old; the tribe of Simeon ever seeming to crawl through its history blasted by the character of its first progenitor; the people of Moab and Ammon conceived in sin, and bearing the features of it, the peculiar features of their lustful origin, in their aspect as nations—why, I repeat, should God thus deal with the posterity of Esau?—for that he does so is clear, the prophets ever labouring with their burden of woes for Edom; actually imputing to that people, this their father's transgression, and fining them with

<sup>a</sup> Comp. Gen. xxv. 30. and xxvi. 1.

the entail of their father's curse<sup>a</sup>. I know not why, unless for this reason, that Esau in despising the birth-right despised a Saviour to whom it led; and that the stone which the builder rejected fell upon him and his, and ground them to powder.

I have now pursued this history of Jacob and Esau from its opening to its end; a history perhaps as intricate as any in all Scripture, and one in which we should be assuredly entangled did we not make the Angel of the Covenant our guide to lead us on our way; did not that 'burning lamp pass between the pieces' of it, complicated as it is, and separate the unclean from the clean. But I have traced the promise of the Messiah working actively throughout it, in the birth of the children marked by a distinction of *re-*

<sup>a</sup> See Jeremiah xl ix. 7—10.; Obadiah 6—9; Malachi i. 3, 4.

*ligious* privilege; in the conveyance of the blessing attended by *religious* rites; in the terms of the blessing, terms of *religious* import; in the caution which accompanied the blessing, a caution against *irreligious* alliances; in the mitigated condemnation which God passed on the offence, where a *desire for Christ* constrained the offender; where the light that led astray was light from heaven; where the sinner was more Christ's in his sin, than the sufferer in his innocence. And on a review of the whole argument, and an estimate of the difficulties in which the opposite hypothesis involves us, I cannot but once again exclaim with our Church, that 'they are not to be heard who feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises'.

Now if the prospect of a Messiah to come stirred the Patriarch so effectually, sometimes

by its very lustre and by the illusion under which he beheld it, driving him to deeds of unholy enterprize—if again, those deeds, sinful as they were in themselves, found mercy at God's hands by reason of the *Faith*, however abused, under which they were wrought being itself a thing so precious in his sight; what a spur shall it be to us, lazy as we are; what a comfort to us, conscience-stricken as we ought to be; to know of a surety that the Christ is come; that our eyes have seen our Salvation; that doctrine and duty are to us plain. Our fathers walked sometimes in a doubtful light, and stumbled and fell—we have Life and Immortality shining before us like the noon-day. The Promise on God's part has been made good. The seed of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob hath blessed the world. Of that multitude of nations whereof they were to be the spiritual Fathers

are we—we, the remotest of the Isles. And God Almighty grant that being so, we allow no evil lust to *supplant* us in our best possession, lest, like Esau, when we would inherit it we be rejected and find no place for repentance, though we seek it carefully with tears.

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## LECTURE IV.

JACOB'S PROPHECY CONCERNING SIMEON AND LEVI  
CONSIDERED.

## GENESIS XLIX. 7.

*Cursed be their anger for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.*

JACOB when he was a dying assembled his children around him to give them his blessing; and whilst he was thus musing the fire of prophecy kindled, and at length he spake with his tongue the future fortunes of his race. What should befall them in the latter day, them or the tribes that should spring from them—for here, as is so commonly the case in Scripture, the one is the representative of the many—is severally set forth in splendid imagery, and the portions of Canaan which

they would respectively occupy in the fulness of time are already declared when as yet the nation was in the loins of these its fathers. Waving however all consideration of the remainder, I propose to examine the parable of the patriarch touching Simeon and Levi, because an observation has been hazarded in the same popular work, of which I have already spoken, upon this clause of the blessing ; unguarded, as I think, in itself ; and of a kind to disparage the prophecy and to shake its authority—‘ One curious point,’ it is said, ‘ proves the antiquity of this Poem ’ (such is the phrase).—‘ The most splendid destiny is awarded to Judah and the sons of Joseph, but Jacob had never forgotten the barbarity of Simeon and Levi. These two families are condemned to *the same inferior and degraded lot*, as divided and scattered among their brethren. Yet how different

their fate! The tribe of Levi attained the highest rank among their brethren, scattered indeed they were, but in stations of the first distinction, while the feeble tribe of Simeon soon dwindled into insignificance, and became almost extinct. A later poet,<sup>1</sup> (it is added,) ‘certainly Moses himself would not have united these two tribes under the same destiny.’<sup>2</sup>

The ancient date of this prophetic address, for such I shall still venture to consider it, may indeed be thus argued; but the proof of its antiquity will be thought dearly bought at the price of its inspiration, and its date will be a matter of comparative indifference when its authority is gone. But I apprehend that if we take the proper view of this remarkable passage, neither its antiquity nor its inspiration will suffer at our hands; and

<sup>1</sup> Hist. of the Jews, v. I. p. 55.

that whilst the indistinctness with which it speaks of events that are coming, argues it to be antecedent to the events themselves, its close application to them when they are come, proves it to be prophetical. The question will compel us to investigate the progress of Simeon and Levi, through the individual to the tribe.

‘Simeon and Levi are *brethren*,’ says Jacob in the opening of this part of his vision; and whilst he speaks of all his other sons separately and in order, these two he classes together, and blesses or curses together. I say blesses or curses, for out of the same mouth both blessing and cursing proceed, however unwittingly in the speaker. But why are they *brethren* more than others; more for instance than Reuben and Judah, or Issachar and Zebulon? They were all six children of one and the same mother

even Leah, and of one and the same father even Isaac<sup>a</sup>. Yet Simeon and Levi only are *brethren*—Simeon and Levi only are yoked together in Jacob's catalogue of his children and of their portions. Brethren then they must be in some other sense than mere relation of blood. Companions they must have been above the rest; confederates in whatever they put their hands unto; this must have been their brotherhood; a sympathy probably arising out of years nearly the same, for Levi was next in succession of birth to Simeon, and tempers nearly the same too, for both were fierce and furious. Symptoms of such *confederacy* between them are to be detected in their history. Dinah their sister had been humbled by the Prince of Shechem; her disgrace was to be avenged; her brethren are very wroth when they hear

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xxix. 32—35. xxx. 18—20.

of it ; but the two of them all to devise the stratagem by which the wrong was to be repaid, and to execute it too with a merciless severity, were Simeon and Levi—yet she had other brothers. And it may be suspected perhaps that when Joseph introduced to Pharoah ‘*fire men*’ only of his brethren<sup>a</sup>, whilst the sons of his father’s *wives*, for to these probably the introduction would be confined, were seven in number besides himself, there was some reason for the exclusion of the other two ; some reason possibly founded in this recollection of the signal cruelty of the other two ‘ when he besought them and they would not hear ;’ the two being (it might seem) Simeon and Levi ; for with respect to Simeon at least such is actually the Jewish tradition ; and Joseph’s

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xlvi. 2.

severe treatment of him when he detained him and bound him before the eyes of the rest, gives it countenance. This however, it must be confessed, is a conjecture, the other was a fact. Now it is to such habitual *confederacy* between Simeon and Levi that Jacob alludes, when he speaks of them above all his other children as brethren, and unites them in the blessing. And this *confederacy* must be taken as the key to the prophecy concerning them. ‘Simeon and Levi,’ says their father, ‘are brethren, instruments of cruelty are in their habitations,’ or their *consultations* are instrumental to cruelty. ‘O my soul, come not thou into their *secret*; unto their *assembly*, mine honour, be not thou united; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall.’ The private meeting; the dark

debate ; confidence given and received ; such are the leading features of this picture of Simeon and Levi ; the whole phraseology indicating, as I have said, the close *confederacy* which subsisted between them. Accordingly it is to this peculiarity in their circumstances that Jacob addresses himself ; it is this which furnishes him with the text of his harangue ; and lifting up his voice in prophecy he exclaims, ‘I will *divide* them in Jacob, and *scatter* them in Israel.’ This confederacy, close as it now is, I pronounce dissolved—*brethren* they shall be no more. I will sow *division* between them by bringing them into mutual conflict. This is the first disruption of a union which they have abused<sup>a</sup>. More-

<sup>a</sup> It has been objected that the word ‘divide’ (קָרַב) will scarcely bear the sense I assign to it. That it means to divide with a view to disperse, as to ‘divide the spoil.’ But it is not confined to this meaning.

over I will *scatter* them in Israel, by dispersing their dwellings over the face of the land. This is the next. The separation two-fold and complete; a severance of each from the other; a dissolution of each in itself. The schism wide, in proportion as the previous communication was intimate. The latter estate a contrast to the first. Such was the leading idea in Jacob's mind when he uttered his prophecy.

Let us now see in what manner the two clauses of it were severally brought to pass.

And first, as to the means which Providence employed to effect the separation of

Thus 'their heart is *divided*' (Hos. x. 2.) i. e. half to God and half to idols. And 'divide the hair' (Ezek. v. 1.) i. e. into three parts. Moreover according to the usual interpretation of the passage, the two clauses are merely tautological; I will divide them in Jacob, signifying precisely the same thing as I will scatter them in Israel.

Simeon and Levi from each other as tribes— their separation, I mean, in a degree which should be the reverse of the forefather's union, so that instead of being as at the first brothers above all, they should be above all, adversaries.

In the march through the wilderness, the tribes, for to tribes the sons of Jacob had now grown, turn to the sin of idolatry, and in the absence of Moses fall to the licentious worship of a molten calf. When the Law-giver comes down from the Mount, and finds the people in their sin, in the very act, he stands in the gate of the camp and cries, ‘ who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me. And all the *sons of Levi* gathered themselves together unto him.’<sup>a</sup> He commands them to go through the camp from gate to gate and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.

<sup>a</sup> Exod. xxxii. 26.

They do so. They cut their way through the camp, sparing none; those of Simeon falling before their sword, as did others. For Moses in reviewing the transaction evidently considers it as a great sacrifice of personal and private feeling on the part of Levi to his zeal for the service of God. ‘He said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children.’<sup>a</sup> The kindred here spoken of whom he thus hewed down could scarcely be persons of his own tribe, for his own tribe were unanimous on God’s side, ‘*all* the sons of Levi gathered themselves together.’ The expression therefore of father and mother and brethren and children must be figurative, and relate to those in the closest alliance with Levi, those whom his heart would bleed to slay by reason of such alliance;

<sup>a</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 9.

and who could they be but the sons of Simeon? Then began Simeon and Levi to be *divided* in Jacob. Again Israel sin after the similitude of the former transgression, and join themselves to Baal-Peor—Simeon was on this occasion, there is good reason to think, as very probably he was before, the most offending of the tribes. For the sudden and singular reduction in the numbers of that tribe, as compared before and after the pestilence which was the visitation of that sin, points with great likelihood to Simeon as the chief transgressor<sup>a</sup>. Once more the avenger appears in the tribe of Levi. Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the *Simeonites*, is the representative of the transgressors. Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the Priest, he therefore a *Levite*, the representative of the cause of God, the

<sup>a</sup> Comp. Numb. i. 23, and Numb. xxvi. 14.

slayer of Zimri and the stayer of the Plague. Again therefore upon this second high and critical occasion Levi stands up against Simeon —and thus once again are Simeon and Levi *divided* in Jacob. And as the quarrels of former friends are usually the most lasting of any, and religious quarrels of all the most rancorous, so does it seem to have been here. For it is remarkable that when Levi gained the ascendancy in the religious commonwealth of Israel, Simeon, as if suffering under an adverse influence, declined, till it became the least and the least distinguished of the tribes. So were Simeon and Levi effectually *divided* one from the other in Jacob; the ancient but often guilty amity of the founders of their race interrupted; events arising under God's controlling hand to dissolve the banns.

But they were also to be *scattered* in Israel. This too was accomplished. In Levi, by

God's adoption of that tribe for his own, instead of the first-born of Israel who were his of right ever since their miraculous preservation in Egypt when all the first-born of the Egyptians were smitten. The tribe of Levi, I say, God adopted. The Levites became his ministers for holy things; the officers of his government; dispersed for the purpose of maintaining it throughout his territory in cities set apart for them. They were *scattered* in Israel. In Simeon too the prophecy was fulfilled, but after another sort. Though in the division of Canaan the lot of Simeon was the second to come forth, such had been his conduct in the wilderness that he was lightly esteemed, and it was thought enough to assign to this reprobate body a portion 'within the inheritance of Judah,' a mere remnant of land which was left over and above to that powerful clan; and soon

by reason of the straitness of his borders was Simeon distressed, few as were his numbers; and one colony he despatched to Mount Seir, once the possession of the Amalekites <sup>a</sup>; and another to the entrance of Gedor where were fat pastures formerly the dwelling-place of the sons of Ham <sup>b</sup>. And it seems probable that discomfort at home which in these instances drove the men of that tribe far a-field, a discomfort which was experienced by Simeon in a degree quite peculiar to himself, did not fully find its relief even here, but that besides these bodies of emigrants, many individuals also were constrained by the same untoward circumstances to be strangers and sojourners among other tribes. And so was Simeon *scattered* in Israel.

Thus the *confederacy* which Simeon and Levi had maintained and which Jacob their

<sup>a</sup> 1 Chron. iv. 42.

<sup>b</sup> Ibid. 39.

father had denounced, was utterly brought to nought; the burden of Jacob's prophecy accomplished; and the alliance of these his sons which had been a grief unto him, turned into the judicial division and dispersion of their posterity.

But it will be said that the real difficulty of the question has not yet been approached; that the prophecy of Jacob ought to apply both to Simeon and Levi alike; and yet that according to my own shewing nothing can be more dissimilar than the lots which befel them.—I reply that however dissimilar the fortunes of the two tribes proved in the event, *the language of Jacob is strictly appropriate to both.* And I further remark that a most singular developement of the workings of God's providence, and of the ductility of events under his hands, is furnished by the fulfilment of this prediction. Here was the

language of the prophet, for such I maintain it to be, and not of the poet, fixed as the foundation of the hills; God whose Spirit prompted it, pledged to bring it to pass; language which no doubt the by-stander at the time would have interpreted as bespeaking the future fortunes of Simeon and Levi to be identical. Both are comprehended under it. No exception or qualification occurs in the terms in favour of the one or the other. Yet we find that whilst this language is literally fulfilled in the histories of Simeon and Levi, nothing can be more unlike than the two histories themselves. That whilst Jacob in the sorrow of his heart, contemplates these his two sons as confederates, and pronounces the dissolution of the confederacy and dispersion of the parties, *in general terms*, God confirms his words, (for thus far Jacob was allowed to look into futurity,) and does make

events minister to such dissolution and such dispersion ; but then He reserves to himself the prerogative of over-ruling those events at a point beyond that which Jacob's eye was allowed to reach, so as to make the issue still not absolute but respective. The prophecy was to stand fast ; and fast it stood, being strictly accomplished in the posterity of the brothers ; this I have already shown ; but still God did not so tie up His hands by it as to put himself out of a condition to discriminate afterwards, if through any contingency, the necessity for discrimination should arise. God permitted Jacob in spirit to make a rude sketch of the future, which might serve for either of his two sons, but he reserved it to himself to fill up the details and complete the portraits ; and whilst the outline was still faithfully preserved one and the same, the colouring and complexion which were to be

the work of the master-hand, afforded ample opportunity for making the one picture to honour and the other to dishonour. And accordingly events so worked together, that the words of Jacob which were the same both for Simeon and Levi, in Simeon and Levi did actually find their completion; yet under the form of a curse to the one, and to the other of a blessing. Jacob had said, they shall be *divided*; divided they were, wide asunder as the poles, the one becoming God's ministers, the other God's tempters. Jacob had said, they shall be *dispersed*; dispersed they were, the one by the conditions of an honourable office; the other by the constraints of a contemptible territory; but in both instances the frame-work of the prophecy was the same at first and remained the same at last, though the bodies which were clothed upon it were altogether different.

Nor is it hard to discover the grounds of the distinction which God was pleased to take in the two cases. Simeon and Levi were both as individuals and as tribes, of ‘a strong blood’, children of the sun, fervent in their temperament, dispositions apt to nourish virtues or vices on a luxuriant scale. It came to pass that in the case of Levi, as in the cases of David and of Paul, the current of his passion eventually took a right direction ; it became zeal for the honour of God ; he kindled at the insult offered to the glorious majesty of God ; he smote the foul idolater though his friend and brother ; and for this, as it should seem from the words of Moses<sup>a</sup>, had the Urim and Thummim committed to his charge ; God proposing to take a spirit so intrepid into His own peculiar service ; and so He directed the course of Jacob’s prophecy

<sup>a</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 9.

as far as it regarded *Levi*, to a prosperous issue. It might be conceived as a curse, it was completed as a blessing; such being no unusual dispensation of God, for Caiaphas meant it in malice that ‘one man shall die for the people’, but God took up his words, and turned them to mercy; and though the Almighty imposed it upon man when he fell, as a curse, that he should eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, yet that curse was so ordered that to man when he was fallen it became a good and a gracious ordinance, his innocence being best secured by his toil. The current of *Simeon’s* passion, on the other hand, equally strong perhaps in itself, took an ill direction, it became a lust after idols and the abominations which attended them, and so God directed the course of Jacob’s prophecy, as far as regarded him, to have an evil issue; and as it was originally imagined

in wrath, so in wrath was it, in this instance, suffered to spend itself, and Simeon sunk into dishonour.

Thus the language of Jacob, though in terms one and the same for all, was set for the rise and for the fall of many in Israel. And whilst our interpretation of it serves to show the necessity in all speculations upon prophecy to look below the surface before we pronounce, particularly where to pronounce is to depreciate, it serves also to display the glory of God in His government of the universe. For does it not argue in Him fathomless resources; a treasury of means affluent beyond all we can conceive or think; when He can thus bind Himself down to accomplish certain objects in the dim and distant future, and yet can afford to vary his line of march towards those objects according to the contingent conduct of parties concerned, and

those parties not necessary but free agents? —Must not His controul over events be as absolute as that of a potter over the clay, when He can thus mould them at once to fit a definite prediction to which He stands committed, (I would speak with all reverence, but I would fain make myself understood,) and to fit also each and all of those moral beings who are the subjects of the prediction, standing perhaps as they do, in direct contrast to one another; and the justice of God requiring that to such contrast due consideration should be had? Does it not demand a hand of more than common cunning to strike at once, not one mark but many, and those not contiguous in their positions, but rather confronted?

Wherfore seeing the ease with which Providence can impart to events the most refractory a bias of its own—seeing how

opportunely it can interpose to break the fall of those who take warning and wax wise in time, and save them from dashing their foot against a stone, great as may be their danger —seeing how often the end of things, (so plastic are circumstances to the finger of God,) corresponds but little to the outset, nay many a time contradicts it altogether— seeing all this, let us be careful to make God our friend, and for the rest, be of good cheer; be of good cheer, not indeed suffering ourselves to drift passively on with the tide, and lie where it leaves us aground, for Providence will not befriend him who will not bestir himself as duty calls, and ‘except these abide in the ship’, said St. Paul when the sailors would have abandoned her, ‘ye cannot be saved’, insured as they were by the promise of an angel; but actually and resolutely striving and struggling as best we may,

however little may be our encouragement to persevere, let us take comfort in this, even in the full assurance that whatever curse may seem to overhang us or ours, an arm there is on high that can direct it, though our own cannot of itself, nay that can actually transform it into an exceeding great good; and that our God is the same God of Simeon and Levi, who had a respect, we find, unto their several ways as they became pleasing or perverse before Him, even when the prophecy which He had permitted to go forth might seem to have circumscribed the sphere in which His Providence could act, by a pledge; and that whilst this pledge He faithfully redeemed, He redeemed it in such a manner as not to confound the two parties who had once indeed been grinding at the same mill, though they did so no longer; but so as that one should be taken and the other left.

## LECTURE V.

RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF THE PATRIARCHS VINDICATED.

EXODUS III. 6.

*I am the God of thy Father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*

IT is my intention in this Lecture to endeavour to set the ‘mixed character’ of the Patriarchs, as it has been called, in its true light; a subject which has given occasion to the scoffs of the infidel, and has been cumbered not a little by the indiscreet help of the friends of religion. The question indeed is not without its difficulties; nor do I think that those difficulties ‘are entirely of our own making’, as the recent historian of the Jews asserts, or that ‘having chosen without warrant,’ as he says, ‘from reason or revelation to conclude that the instruments must neces-

sarily be the favourites of the Almighty, we embarrass ourselves with the necessity of vindicating all their actions.'<sup>a</sup>

Certainly it is a great mistake to suppose that God approves whatever he uses; his enemies perpetually serve him for tools. Nebuchadnezzar himself is several times called 'His servant', just as David is so called<sup>b</sup>—Assyria destroys the nations of his own heart, as he imagines, but he is therein 'the rod of God's anger'<sup>c</sup>; and the wicked are spoken of in the Psalms as 'the sword of the Lord.'<sup>d</sup> But in the case before us is it clear that the Scripture itself does not represent the parties as favourites of God? 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob', is language which would

<sup>a</sup> Hist. of the Jews. Appendix p. 6.

<sup>b</sup> Jerem. xxv. 9. *et alibi.*

<sup>c</sup> Isaiah x. 5. 7. xlvi. 6.

<sup>d</sup> Ps. xvii. 13.

undoubtedly seem to imply on the part of God some approbation of those whom He thus acknowledges. Abraham is said in a peculiar manner to be ‘the friend of God’<sup>a</sup>. God ‘blessed Isaac’<sup>b</sup>. God ‘loved Jacob’<sup>c</sup>. Terms which surely must be taken as testimonials of the favour which God bore to these patriarchs. Yet, it may be asked, was Abraham acting in that simplicity which is well pleasing to God when he equivocated to Pharaoh respecting Sarah, desiring her to tell him that she was his sister, (though there was no positive falsehood in this,) when she actually was his wife<sup>d</sup>? And again when he did the same thing by Abimelech, though he had seen the will and the power of God to protect both himself and her, displayed on that former occasion when he plagued Pha-

<sup>a</sup> James ii. 23.

<sup>b</sup> Gen. xxv. 11.

<sup>c</sup> Rom. ix. 13.

<sup>d</sup> Gen. xii. 13.

raoh till he released Sarah <sup>a</sup>? Was Isaac acting agreeably to God, when he adopted the same stratagem on Rebekah's account at Gerar, asserting that she too was his sister <sup>b</sup>? Or when he would willingly have diverted the course of God's blessing from the younger to the elder; express declaration having been made by God himself, (of which he must have been aware,) that the elder was to serve the younger <sup>c</sup>? Was the mere eating of his son Esau's venison a sufficient reason or any reason for endeavouring to frustrate God's purposes towards Jacob whom He had chosen? Was Jacob again on his part acting agreeably to God when he obtained the blessing, (however his due,) from a blind parent by a succession of frauds? How can these things be? What answer have we to give to those who call our faith in this mat-

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xx. 2.

<sup>b</sup> xxvi. 7.

<sup>c</sup> xxv. 23.

ter in question? How are the scoffers who object these offences against men who are spoken of as the friends of God, to be put to silence? For the answer which I have already quoted is evidently no answer at all—it is an abandonment not a defence of the patriarchs, who in this instance, as in others, have met with hard measure at the hands of their critic, owing as appears to me to a radical misconception of the spirit of their history, which must be regarded as a *religious* history in order to be understood; ‘the general design of Scripture being,’ says Bishop Butler, ‘to give us an account of the world in this single view, *as God’s world*; by which,’ he continues, ‘it appears essentially distinguished from all other books’<sup>a</sup>. Keeping such distinction steadily before us, a distinction which can never be lost sight of with

<sup>a</sup> *Analogy*, p. 377.

safety, I will approach the case of the Patriarchs, and endeavour to reconcile their manifest frailties with God's no less manifest favour. And in order to this we must once more advert to the *religious* condition of the world at the time when these distinguished characters lived, and the peculiar force of the language of Scripture as applied to them.

The earth then having become again corrupt before God, idolatry prevailing over the face of it ; it was necessary that some means should be taken for a great revival of religion amongst mankind, and the knowledge of God be again quickened. Abraham was the man chosen by Providence for its instrument on this occasion. Through him the worship of the true God, now all but expiring, was to be restored ; and accordingly to him both the prophets and apostles usually trace up and not beyond him, as the rock whence the

Church of God was hewn, and the hole of the pit whence it was digged<sup>a</sup>. He therefore was commanded to get him away from his kindred in Haran—they too devoted to other gods—to a distant country, where embarrassed by no local ties, nor warped by the contagious influence of his own race, he might walk the world upright and alone. Forth therefore he went to the land of Canaan, *the depository of the doctrine of the Unity of the Godhead*; I mean his unity as opposed to any notion of a rival; of the doctrine that there was none other besides *his* God that ruled in heaven or in earth. It was upon this understanding that the covenant between the Almighty and Abraham was founded; that covenant by which God undertook on his part to give the posterity of Abraham the

<sup>a</sup> Is. li. 2.; Malach. ii. 10.; Acts vii. 2.; Rom. iv. 16.; Hebr. xi. 12.

land of Canaan, and to raise up among them Him in whom all the nations should be blessed; Abraham and his children undertaking on their part to serve the Lord their God and none else—‘I will make thee exceeding fruitful’, such are the terms of the covenant, ‘and I will make nations of thee and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee*. And I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and *I will be their God*’<sup>a</sup>. And when many years afterwards the Almighty threatened the Israelites under Moses, how that if they went astray he would destroy their high

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xvii. 7, 8.

places and cut down their images, and cast their carcases upon the carcases of their idols, he adds, in case of their true allegiance, that he would ‘remember his covenant with Jacob and his covenant with Isaac and his covenant with Abraham’<sup>a</sup>; as though that covenant was still considered to rest on the worship of Him single and undivided.

Now this great principle was the groundwork of all religion. No superstructure could be reared till this foundation was laid. When mankind had no assurance of the fit object of their worship, how could due worship be paid? The matter at issue was, whether faith should be found on the earth or no.—A vast trust therefore was placed in the keeping of Abraham, and he was true to it.—He was true to it, and he also caused his children after him to be true to it, even as God had

<sup>a</sup> Levit. xxvi. 30. 42.

said; and in the midst of a multitude of pretended gods of the nations with which both he and they were surrounded, whether in the country where they dwelt, or in the country where they sojourned, the gods of Canaan and the gods of Egypt; seducing as many of their rites were, and hard as it was to stand out against universal example, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were all true and faithful to the one God who had revealed Himself to them; never forfeited, no not for once, their loyalty to Him; neither joining Him with other gods, nor forsaking Him altogether. I say never once forfeited; for the only passage which may seem to imply the contrary admits of an easy explanation and requires it—Jacob, it is true, ‘commands his household and all that are with him to put away the strange gods that were among them<sup>a</sup>.—But

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xxxv. 2.

the moment of the command bespeaks the nature of it. His camp was then full of idolatrous Shechemites, whose city he had just sacked, and taken its citizens captive. And ‘the strange gods’ and ‘the ear-rings’ of this Canaanitish multitude were they that the patriarch forthwith took and buried under the oak at Shechem, not permitting them to pass the precincts of the place they had polluted; much less profane Beth-El whither he was going, the house of God, and gate of heaven.— This is the interpretation of those orders of Jacob, who is actually held up to his idolatrous descendants as an example of exclusive devotion to God, not without an allusion perhaps to this very transaction, by the prophet Hosea <sup>a</sup>; and this is the only passage in the whole history of the three patriarchs that contains a suspicion of idolatry as tarnishing

<sup>a</sup> Hos. xii. 4, 5. See Pole in loc.

their fair fame.—God therefore was the *God* of Abraham, and the *God* of Isaac, and the *God* of Jacob, in an emphatic sense ; He and He only was their *God*. This was their great glory ; and it is in reference to such consideration, I apprehend, that God's peculiar regard for them is so often and so strongly expressed ; and not that such expressions are to be received as pledges of the Almighty's unreserved approbation of all their *moral* conduct.

Why indeed should they be so received ? Take a parallel case. Our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to call his disciples ‘his servants’, ‘his friends’; he blessed them for believing in him ; he commended them for forsaking all other things and following him ; he chose them out of the world as rocks upon which to build his church ; but is he therefore to be understood as sanctioning the oaths

and denial of Peter? the incredulity of Thomas? the persecuting spirit of James and John? or the treachery of all at the trying hour?— In like manner God was pleased to acknowledge the patriarchs as his servants, as his friends; to bless them for their faith in Him; to praise them for their giving up country and kindred at his call; to select them from mankind at large as the foundations of his first temple, his primitive church; but He did not hereby set his seal of approval to all their follies and faults. They like other good men were free to fall, and sometimes fell; but how wide was the distinction between them with all their frailties, and the idolaters. They might sometimes choose the evil and refuse the good; but still they were not, like the idolater, lending themselves to a principle which confounded the evil with the good. For what would be thought of murder by

him who made his seed pass through the fire to Moloch? Or of adultery, by him who fell down before Baal-Peor? The sin being in either case the sacrifice? The effect of idolatry was neither more nor less than to disturb all moral distinctions; to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Of such inestimable value was the preservation of the worship of the one true God, pure and unmixed. Accordingly we cannot read the five Books of Moses without being struck with the earnest and reiterated terms in which the worship, the single worship of the one God is enforced. We have little notion of idolatry or its effects at this time of day and in this country, and are therefore scarcely capable of entering fully into the spirit of those parts of Holy Writ which relate to it; but whilst many moral injunctions, which may seem to us of the first importance, are not expressly

named, or not more than once or twice in the writings of Moses, thou shalt not go after other Gods is proclaimed in one shape or other no less than four and forty times in the course of the law, short as it is<sup>a</sup>; as if this one offence, in the eye of God, eclipsed in its magnitude every other; which, it may be added, should seem to be indeed the case, for Jeroboam is ever represented as the king ‘*who made Israel to sin*,’ corrupt as Israel was in morals even before Jeroboam; and Isaiah very often speaks of the ‘iniquity’ of Israel, where he appears to mean principally if not solely their idolatry. And to purge out this dross chiefly and above all was the Babylonish captivity prepared as a furnace. Nor in vain; since, however depraved in morals Israel continued after this bondage, it was idolatrous no more. Nay, even all the pro-

<sup>a</sup> See Patrick on Exod. xxiii. 13.

visions of the law seem to have a reference to it more or less direct. No image was to be made, whether for worship or ornament, as all the latter Jews, if not the earlier, understood the prohibition, lest the beauty of the object should lead them to follow the example of the heathens and do it homage. Nor was any grove to be planted near an altar, though the altar were built to God himself<sup>a</sup>, lest the grove should be devoted to the abominations for which such places among the Gentiles were famous, who ‘inflamed themselves with idols under every green tree.’ Nor were horses to be multiplied<sup>b</sup>, which might bring the people into communication with Egypt, at once a land of horses and idolatry. If fury, anger, indignation be ascribed to God, in the language of the law it is invariably with

<sup>a</sup> Deut. xvi. 21.

<sup>b</sup> Ib. xvii. 16.

a respect unto idolatry<sup>a</sup>. It is with an eye to idolatry that God assumes ‘Jealous’ for one of his names<sup>b</sup>. Such a leading idea in the law strongly supports the interpretation I have given of God being the *God* of Abraham, and the *God* of Isaac, and the *God* of Jacob; of his being peculiarly the ‘friend’ of those patriarchs; not as though such terms implied them to be in their morals altogether blameless, but rather to be men stedfast to the covenant; exclusive and zealous worshippers of Jehovah themselves; and representatives of the nation as yet in their loins who were to be his own also; righteous men, no doubt, but subject withal, like other good men, to human weakness; in general, examples of stedfast faith to be reverenced and followed; occasionally, examples of singular frailty to be lamented and shunned.

<sup>a</sup> See Patrick. Exod. xx. 5.      <sup>b</sup> Exod. xxxiv. 14.

And in the correctness of this view, I feel further confirmed by an expression in the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>a</sup>. There the faith of these very Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is under discussion<sup>b</sup>; the soundness of it is asserted, and the proofs are given. ‘Wherefore,’ says the author of that Epistle, ‘God is not *ashamed* to be called their God,’ or, as it might run more literally, ‘is not ashamed of *them*, to be called their God;’ as if anticipating the very objection we have been considering, that the characters of these Patriarchs were not exempt from serious flaws, such as might well make God ashamed of them; and still for all that affirming that God was nevertheless contented to overlook those flaws so far as to bestow on them a high and honourable title in consideration of their singular fidelity to him.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. xi. 16.

<sup>b</sup> v. 8, 9.

Nor will the interpretation which I have been giving of the terms in question, fail to derive support from the signification of such terms in Scripture as are opposed to them—*their antagonists*—for the sense in which a Father of Israel was called a ‘friend of God,’ will be more nearly determined, if we can determine what was meant by an *enemy* of God.

Now the second commandment in the twentieth chapter of Exodus has for its object the prohibition of idolatry; and accordingly the idolater is there described under the name of one who ‘hates’ God:—‘Rise up, Lord, and let thine *enemies* be scattered, and let them that hate thee flee before thee’<sup>a</sup>, is the language of Moses when the ark set forward to win its way through the idolatrous nations who opposed its advance. So

<sup>a</sup> Numb. x. 35.

that in the vocabulary of the Old Testament by the ‘haters’ or ‘enemies’ of God, were understood especially and above all others, idolaters. And as enemies they were treated beyond all others. Whoever it might be that enticed another to idolatry, even though the nearest and dearest kinsman, no eye was to pity him, he was on no account to be spared, he was not to be concealed, he was surely to be killed, to be stoned with stones till he died. The idolatrous city was to be smitten with the edge of the sword; all in it was to be destroyed utterly; no exception was to be made even of the cattle; it was to be left for an heap for ever. And how loudly these severities were called for, and how inadequately even these preserved the people of Israel from the worship of false gods is seen by all their subsequent history. For they suffered the Canaanites to remain in the

land as tributaries, contrary to God's command; and that people became (what God foretold they would become) scourges in their sides and thorns in their eyes; seducing them by degress to a defection from God almost universal; so that by the time of Elijah, when he was the only prophet of the true God to be found in all the country, of Baal's prophets there were readily produced four hundred and fifty, and of the prophets of the Groves four hundred; and though the Israelites had entered the land of Canaan six hundred thousand men, there were now to be counted seven thousand only amongst the whole nation that had not bowed the knee to Baal; and it should seem from the one burden of the later prophets, their single, ceaseless, terrific cry, against the idol, the maker of the idol, and the worshipper of the idol, that before the captivity the sin had

become still more insufferable. So unspeakably important a thing was it for mankind at large, at a period when the current set so strong for the worship of false gods, that one man or one family should stand for the exclusive and uncompromising worship of the true God,—so consistent is it with the plan upon which God's counsels proceeded, as developed in his own word, that He should express partiality and affection above measure for the few that were faithful to him amongst the multitudes that were faithless,—so agreeable to His nature was it then (as it still is) in consideration of that faith, to pardon or overlook the errors of conduct into which such persons might fall by sudden surprize, or strong temptation, or human infirmity, or inadequate knowledge,—Rahab herself, by reason of her confession in the midst of so much to lead her astray, that the

God of Israel ‘ was the God in heaven above and in the earth beneath ’<sup>a</sup>, that is, by reason of her faith in this great first principle of religion<sup>b</sup>, was saved in the ruin of her town in spite of her past evil life. And the Gibeonites, because moved by the same principle, a belief in the name of the Lord, the God of Joshua, they having heard of his fame and all that he did in Egypt<sup>c</sup>, were preserved notwithstanding their duplicity, so that even Saul’s slaughter of their posterity, perhaps after four hundred years interval, was not unavenged of God<sup>d</sup>. And possibly the same consideration may furnish a key to the pardon which David obtained at the hand of a justly offended God, he being one of the three kings who according to the author of Ecclesiasticus, ‘ never were defective,’

<sup>a</sup> Josh. ii. 11.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. xi. 31.

<sup>c</sup> Josh. ix. 9.

<sup>d</sup> 2 Sam. xxi. 1.

that is, never forsook the Most High for idols<sup>a</sup>; and moreover the Lord expressly tells Solomon that David his father had walked ‘in integrity of heart’, meaning, as appears by what follows, that, whatever were his other offences, he had never served other gods<sup>b</sup>. And so the like high place in his regard on this self-same account, did God actually vouchsafe to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, notwithstanding the sins of which they were doubtless guilty. And if on the Father of the Faithful himself, a double portion of his parental approbation and love rested, the allegiance of that valiant believer was tried with double force, and stood unshaken.

Thus have I endeavoured to clear up a difficulty, which the mixed character of those

<sup>a</sup> Ecclesiasticus, xlix. 4.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Kings, ix. 4, 6.

who have been called ‘the saints’ of the Old Testament presents; and to explain, how the patriarchs might be fairly represented as God’s own, in spite of those many and frequent backslidings, which still assuredly there was nothing in them to excuse, much less to consecrate.

Now these things were written for our admonition. God is the same to day, yesterday, and for ever. The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, is our God also, and that which was heretofore pleasant or displeasing in his sight is so in principle still. He spared not the worshipper of other gods, but whoso cleaved to Him and to Him alone, in that man did He delight. Still the same is no doubt true. False gods in the literal sense we cannot follow. The circumstances in which we stand differ from those in which the patri-

archs of old stood. But, says St. Paul, ‘covetousness is idolatry.’ ‘And some there are,’ says the Apostle, ‘whose belly is their god.’ And some there are who take for a god a man whose breath is in his nostrils, as they did of old time who cried of their patron it is ‘the voice of a god and not of a man,’ when he spake. And some there are who, as our Lord puts it, ‘serve, (that is worship) mammon and not God.’ So that the love of riches, and the lusts of the flesh, and the praise of men, and the distinctions of life, are still represented as so many idols; and still therefore there may be according to the highest authority, worship of false gods even in times like our own, and amongst persons like ourselves, our bodies indeed, at Bethel, our hearts at Beth-aven<sup>a</sup>; and if the spirit of these precepts be regarded as well as the

<sup>a</sup> Hooker.

letter, idolatry there may be in many things even besides these in which it is expressed: there yet may be Lords many, and Gods many. Let us then search our own hearts, each for himself, that we may discover what the idol is in our own case—be it a lust of the flesh; be it a lust of the eye; be it a pride of life; be it too much carefulness; be it too much selfishness; be it too much indolence; Baals and Belials and Molochs still, but under other forms; let us put it away as an accursed thing, as a thing which is weaning our affections from God on whom they should be set, and effectually including us in the number of those faithless and disloyal creatures who were of old time accounted his *enemies*, and against whom his wrath in turn burned like fire. Let us put the accursed thing away, and with the faithful Abraham for our pattern, set the Lord our God first in

all our doings and yield up to Him our hearts and lives, keeping nothing back; that so, we may be with Abraham, the *friends* of God, not the servants only but the friends; that so we may not forfeit that friendship of God, as Abraham forfeited it not, through those frailties of our nature by reason of which we cannot always stand upright; but find God ready to overlook, to pity, to forgive, and to say to each of us notwithstanding our backslidings, ‘thy *faith* hath saved thee, go in peace.’

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## LECTURE VI.

GENIUS AND CHARACTER OF THE MOSAICAL LAW.

PSALM I. 2.

*His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

IN pursuance of the subject which has occupied my attention hitherto in this course of Lectures, the History of the Jews recently given to the public, I intend in the present sermon to make some remarks on the true genius and character of the Mosaical Law ; thinking the spirit in which that part of the history in question is written, calculated to mislead, by exhibiting the Jewish lawgiver too prominently in the light of an eminent patriot rather than an organ and minister of God ; and the Jewish law as a wise and politic rather than a religious and mystical

code ; a code, not to be compared with any other of ancient date, but standing by itself and alone.

I. I have chosen my text as at once appropriate to the theme before us, and as furnishing me with a favourable introduction to my argument, for coupled with other passages in the Psalms of a similar import, it gives us to understand what were David's own views of the point at issue—the nature of the Mosaical law. For this law must have been at least in the mind of the psalmist when he uttered the words of the text and other like words, it being the only written law of God extant.

This law then was a topic, it seems, on which a man might profitably ‘meditate day and night.’ It is elsewhere spoken of by the same patriarch, as an ‘ undefiled law, converting the soul’; as being ‘sure and giving wisdom to the simple.’ ‘The statutes of the Lord’

are declared to be ‘right and to rejoice the heart’; ‘the commandment of the Lord to be pure and to give light to the eyes.’<sup>a</sup>

Now if in thus saying David contemplated the Mosaical Law—and it is impossible that he should have excluded it from his contemplation—there was something, it appears, to be found in that law which required investigation and thought, in order that its worth might be known; a treasure as it were *hid*; a principle within it, which was calculated to exalt, to purify, to illumine, to change the feelings and taste of him who should make it his study and his guide. But I ask, is this a view of it which corresponds with the notion that it was a scheme of mere temporal legislation, adapted to the temporal wants of mankind, and understood to arm itself with no other than temporal sanctions? What

<sup>a</sup> Ps. xix. 7.

was there in the prospect of a portion more or less desirable in the goodly pastures of Canaan ; in the skilful performance of several intricate rites ; in the washing of cups and of pans and of person ; nay even in the coarser duties of humanity there prescribed ; to be pondered upon day and night with such vast advantage ? What principle was there here capable of converting the soul ; of making the simple wise ; of rejoicing the heart ; of enlightening the eyes ? Surely the Psalmist must have seen more in this law than its letter, before he could invest it with qualities so noble, so peculiar, so elevating.

II. Descend we to later times, and let us observe the terms in which it is spoken of by the prophets ; these will be found to correspond with the sentiments already expressed by David ; they will point as plainly as words can, to an *esoteric* mean-

ing in the law, to high doctrines there communicated as it were in cypher. Thus ‘the place where God should set his name’ is a subject touched with great emphasis in the law. It is represented as the future centre of all the worship of Israel. Thither the rites, ceremonies, sacrifices, devotions, pilgrimages of the people were all to tend as to a point. Such was the future Jerusalem of the law. And what do I find it in the vocabulary of prophecy? There Jerusalem is the dwelling-place of the most high God. It is there in the latter days, when the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed, that the Lord of hosts shall reign before his ancients gloriously<sup>a</sup>. It is in that holy mountain, even Sion, that the great feast is to be set forth unto all the people, the feast of fat things, the feast of wine on the lees, of fat

<sup>a</sup> Is. xxiv. 23.

things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined<sup>a</sup>. There the wolf and the lamb are to feed together, and the leopard is to lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and the little child to lead them, none being to hurt or destroy in all that holy mountain<sup>b</sup>. It would be as reasonable to suppose that these beasts of the field and the extraordinary habits assigned to them are things to be taken in a literal sense, as that this Jerusalem is the city built with hands, or this Sion the rock in Judah. Nor is this all.—Where the multitude of believers which should hereafter be added to the church is spoken of, it is still as an accession to the *Israel* of God<sup>c</sup>. Their approach is an influx into the courts of His temple<sup>d</sup>. The ministers appointed to bear

<sup>a</sup> Is. xxv. 6.

<sup>b</sup> Ib.

<sup>c</sup> Is. ix. 3.

<sup>d</sup> Is. lxii. 9.

them good tidings are watchmen set upon the walls of Jerusalem<sup>a</sup>. The unbelievers that refuse to hearken are Philistines<sup>b</sup>; Moabites<sup>c</sup>; Edomites, inhabitants of Bozrah<sup>d</sup>; Egyptians<sup>e</sup>. The language of our puritans, living as they did after the question had been in a great measure settled by the writings of the New Testament, however audaciously applied, was so far strictly the language of the prophets.

The ceremonial of the law is still regarded by them as a figure; as the mere husk of better things within it. They make it a matter of reproach to their carnal countrymen that they overlooked its spirit, which has all in it that was of value. ‘To what purpose this multitude of sacrifices’, this slavish interpretation of a mysterious law? ‘I am full

<sup>a</sup> Is. xxi. 6.      <sup>b</sup> Ib. xi. 14.      <sup>c</sup> Ib. xxv. 10.  
<sup>d</sup> Ib. xxxiv. 5, 6.      <sup>e</sup> Joel, iii. 19.

of the burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts ?' as though Moses had required far other service; 'bring no more vain oblations '<sup>a</sup>. The whole manifestly an expostulation of God with a people who had wilfully closed their eyes to the meaning of a code, which was, and which they knew to be, a parable. I argue therefore from the uniform language of the prophets, that the dispensation under which the Israelites were living was acknowledged to be a typical dispensation. Their very vocabulary bewrays this to be a popular persuasion; and had it been otherwise, their prophecies must have been as unintelligible to the nation at large, as a dis-

<sup>a</sup> Is. i. 11.

sertation upon any occult science would be to persons unacquainted with its nomenclature. A fact which cannot be better illustrated than by the unworthy sense which is seen to issue from the prophecies when they are handled by those, (some amongst them too, illustrious scholars,) who reject the figurative use of speech in their exposition of them, and understand them to the letter. Accordingly when it comes to the apostle Paul's turn to be an interpreter of Moses he hastens without preface or apology to descant upon this law as *spiritual*; reproves his countrymen for allowing a veil to be upon their heart when it was read; and unfolds the allegories of which (he makes no question about the matter) it was full; so that the principle of interpretation upon which the epistle to the Galatians, as well as that to the Hebrews proceeds, is enough to show that such an allegorical view

of the Levitical code had been always familiar to the Jews; that it was not accounted by them as in any degree fanciful; that it was an argument in which there was nothing of novelty save only the extent to which it was carried. How indeed could the principle be strange to men who had admitted into the canon of Scripture the Song of Solomon; and who had refined indeed upon that principle to such an excess, as to discover or to affect to discover some mystery in every word and letter; every jot and tittle of the law; in the omission or insertion of a vowel; or actually in its very size and shape? Trifling this was with Scripture, if you will, but still the strong propensity argues that there must have been some strong foundation for it; there would not have been so much that was counterfeit if there had not been something that was genuine. That such scheme of in-

terpretation is still liable to abuse in rash and unskilful hands I pretend not to deny; nor do I mean to enter into the question as to the limits within which it should be confined; whether the allegories which the apostle found are to be accepted as excluding or provoking all similar attempts of our own. Suffice it to have shown that the law had undoubtedly in it, and was so understood by the people, a sense beyond that which was ordinary and obvious, and that therefore it cannot be explained with success, upon principles applicable to other codes where the sense is single.

III. There is another consideration distinct from the last though allied to it, which attests the Mosaical law to be a peculiar law, even as the people to whom it was given was a peculiar people. I mean the *extent* to which it admits of this allegorical interpretation whereof I have spoken, both in its general

character and in its details. Chance could not have produced it. A whimsical coincidence between the several parts of two systems of things might happen once or twice without proving any studied relation to subsist between them; but the same could not happen a thousand times, with the same conclusion. Let us take the legal or political history of Greece, of Rome, or of England, and attempt to make it speak parables, and we shall find it frustrate our efforts, baffle our ingenuity. Not so that of Israel.—Indeed there is something singularly harmonious in the subordinate and primary movements of the scheme of their polity; the former serving, if I mistake not, to throw light upon the latter; separate items of their dispensation developing the general law by which it was governed. For, instruction by action rather than by precept is quite a feature in the in-

tercourse of God with his people throughout every age.—I have had occasion to touch upon this subject before<sup>a</sup>, but I must for a moment revert to it.—We see it in the gourd that was made to grow up over the head of Jonah, and then wither away, so that he should be angry for the gourd<sup>b</sup>, when he was to be taught the consideration due to a great city. In the arrows which Joash was commanded by Elisha to take and smite upon the ground, before Syria was to be so smitten<sup>c</sup>.—In the bonds and yokes which Jeremiah was directed to make and put on his neck before the kings were made servants to Babylon<sup>d</sup>.—In the rending of the veil of the temple at the crucifixion.—It is needless to multiply instances. Now this method of instruction the Almighty seems to have

<sup>a</sup> Lecture II.

<sup>b</sup> Jonah iv.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Kings xiii. 18, 19.

<sup>d</sup> Jer. xxvii. 2.

adopted upon a great scale in his very first introduction of himself to Israel, as their Law-giver; and these several detached cases of a like kind but of a later date, appear to be the scattered rear of this his original scheme of Revelation. Bearing then thus much in mind, we shall perceive the nation of Israel to be, as it were, actors upon the wide stage of the universe; in whose persons and by whose adventures, God was rehearsing to all the world the lessons of life.—They were raised up to represent, not altogether unconscious of the part they were playing, the spectacle of the moral government of God. Their annals were so shaped as to be a morality. The prophets indeed, did our present enquiry reach to them, are standing witnesses of the working of this machinery. They are perpetually breaking away from matters of fact in Jewish history

to the corresponding features of God's religious administration of the world; the temporal and practical shadowing forth the eternal and universal. From Hezekiah, or Cyrus, or the prophet himself, they rush to Christ<sup>a</sup>. From the calling of the Jews out of Egypt and Assyria, to the calling of the world to Christ<sup>b</sup>. From the escape out of Babylon, to the escape out of sin<sup>c</sup>. From the desolation coming upon Israel by the armies of the East, to that desolation which shall come upon all the earth when Christ returns at the latter day to summon it to judgement<sup>d</sup>. Moses in the law is to be read upon the same principle of interpretation. The children of Israel were delivered from the bondage of Egypt and were 'baptised in the

<sup>a</sup> Is. xvi. 5. xli. 2. l. 4.

<sup>b</sup> Is. xix. 23.

<sup>c</sup> Is. xlvi. 20. 22. and comp. Rev. xviii. 4.; Is. viii. 11.

<sup>d</sup> Is. xxiv.

sea,' (I speak not here of mine own authority ye well know.)—They toiled through a long and weary pilgrimage towards a better country, a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands.—Howbeit Moses led them but to the borders of that pleasant land, it being reserved to Joshua or Jesus to give them, the people of God, this his rest <sup>a</sup>. Thus the broad outline of the Israelitish history as put upon record by Moses, and as applied by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, wears the aspect of a parable; and the laws of the Israelitish nation which he further promulgates, wear the same. The purgation of almost all things by blood <sup>b</sup>; a process in itself rather to pollute than purify. The body of the victim burned without the camp <sup>c</sup>; an arrangement in itself inconvenient

<sup>a</sup> Hebr. iv. 1.

<sup>b</sup> Hebr. ix. 22.

<sup>c</sup> xiii. 11.

rather than the contrary. The bone of the lamb not to be broken; in the first instance, as it should seem, out of mere haste which could not tarry the dividing asunder the joints and marrow. All, coincidences with holier and better things, (as it afterwards turned out), both in number so great, for I have contented myself with one or two examples; and in nature so peculiar, for they are often trifling and insignificant matters in themselves; as by no possibility to be accidental, or to admit of any satisfactory explanation save one, even that the law and the gospel were constructed as part and counterpart, put together by God, and not by man to be put asunder.

IV. Nor is this all. Difficult as it is to deny that the doctrine of a future state seems proclaimed with little emphasis in the law of Moses, still certain glimpses there are in it of

such a doctrine, the heavens, as it were, here and there opened; glimpses, which sometimes lead us to suspect that the knowledge afloat upon this subject was far more than some are disposed to assign to the Jews; and that they found it in passages of their law where we pass it by. Certain it is, that when the young man in the gospel demanded of Jesus what he was to do that he might inherit *eternal* life, Jesus referred him to the law, ‘what is written in the law, how readest thou’<sup>a</sup>; clearly, I think, implying that the question of eternal life was involved in the law.—And here I shall not press into the service of my argument the usual array of texts which are supposed to convey this truth, and which will occur to you of themselves, but refer you to others less trite, though perhaps not less conclusive; for there

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xix. 16.; Luke x. 26.

are many fragments of the doctrine of a future state, scattered throughout the law, if we will be at the pains to gather them up, enough when compared with its seemingly carnal ordinances, to give a complicated character to it as a whole, and to suggest that in approaching it we are approaching dark and difficult ground.—The tenure by which Canaan is represented as held conveys the idea of something beyond the occupation of the soil. The term *pilgrim* upon earth, by which the Patriarch was designated, and from which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews deduces, that one so called sought some other country<sup>a</sup> is continued under the Levitical law. ‘The land’ says God in reference to Canaan, ‘the land shall not be sold for ever, for the land is mine, and ye are *strangers and sojourners* with me’<sup>b</sup>;

<sup>a</sup> Hebr. xi. 14.

<sup>b</sup> Levit. xxv. 23.

strangers and sojourners in this land, directed therefore by such language to look for a land which should be their own and a dwelling-place which should endure.—Again, touching the memory of the departed, ‘ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead nor print any marks upon you’<sup>a</sup>; an injunction apparently grounded upon the same principle as that which afterwards spake in the words of the apostle, even ‘that we should sorrow not as others who have no hope,’<sup>b</sup> and so understood by Hooker. The law against the necromancer, or one who puts questions to the dead, as the Septuagint translators render it, whatever may have been the offence, and whether one of imposture or otherwise, at any rate

<sup>a</sup> Levit. xix. 27.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 13.

points to a popular belief of a world beyond the grave<sup>a</sup>. And another passage seems no less calculated to impress us with a notion that there was a treasury of religious knowledge in the keeping of the Israelites beyond the ordinary estimate. ‘It came to pass,’ we are told, ‘at the end of four hundred and thirty years, *even the self-same day it came to pass*, that the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt’<sup>b</sup>. Now if the point from which this period takes its date was the day when God made the promise to Abraham, as should seem by a text in the Epistle to the Galatians<sup>c</sup>, it would follow that this day had been ever observed amongst the Israelites, even during their bondage, as an anniversary, a day much to be remembered; and such a notion corresponds with the testimony borne

<sup>a</sup> Deut. xviii. 10.      <sup>b</sup> Exod. xii. 41.

<sup>c</sup> Gal. iii. 16, 17.

in the speech of Stephen, who tells us, that when Moses saw one of the children of Israel suffer wrong and defended him and smote the Egyptian, ‘he supposed his brethren *would have understood* how that God by his hand would deliver them’<sup>a</sup>. And it may be added, that the oath which Joseph took of the children of Israel before he died, saying, surely God will visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence; and the scrupulous care with which Moses in the confusion of a forced flight from Egypt complied with this command two hundred years after it had been uttered<sup>b</sup>, seems to imply the existence of an intense tradition amongst the people, grounded upon God’s early promises to their fathers, such as the mere surface of the history by no means indicates. Nay more—as in the later days of the Jewish empire the

<sup>a</sup> Acts vii. 25.

<sup>b</sup> Exod. xiii. 19.

doctrine of the rewards and punishments of a future life was beyond all question habitually circulated in the vernacular language of the time, through emblems drawn from scenes which Canaan supplied; for on the one hand, the blessed were to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; on the other, the cursed were to be consigned to Tophet ordained of old, that valley of corpses in the suburbs of Jerusalem, the type of Hell, where the worm of corruption never died and the funeral fire was never quenched; so is it probable that in the earliest periods similar ideas were attached more or less distinctly to similar objects, and that the remarkable emphasis with which the glories of Canaan are described, glories far beyond those with which nature had clothed it, so much so that the fact has furnished an infidel objection; as well as the horrid catalogue of blight and blast, famine

and sword, locust and murrain, for which those glories were to be exchanged, were understood to express more than met the ear, to breath something beyond themselves, and in such ulterior sense have been regarded by Calvin, whose hints upon the character of the Mosaical law, whatever may be our reasonable dread of his distinguishing dogma, bear all the marks of a masterly conception of these ancient oracles of God <sup>a</sup>.

V. There is one aspect more in which the Levitical law presents itself, and which quite takes it out of the rule of ordinary codes of law—the disposition which it manifests to multiply offences with a studious purpose of making all men debtors to it. The ordinary object of law is to protect; the peculiar object of the Levitical law is to condemn. Of

<sup>a</sup> Institut. Christ. Relig. Lec. ii. c. viii. § 8, and Lec. ii. c. xi. § 3.

what possible consequence could it be to society, if we consider the matter merely on its own merits, whether a kid be seethed in its mother's milk or not; whether the dam be taken sitting on its young ones or whether the young be taken without the dam; whether the plough be drawn by an ox and an ass, or by any other beasts of draught yoked in any other combination; whether woollen and linen be woven into the same garment, or either stuff to the exclusion of the other; whether fringes be made upon four quarters of a vesture or not? How are these, and a multitude of other rules equally arbitrary and capricious, as it should seem, independently considered, to be viewed except as parts of a system of law meant to implicate, meshes of a net intended to be so fine as that nothing might escape it? And the same may be said, I think, of many other injunctions in the Le-

ritical law which have been sometimes supposed to have for their sole end the separation of the people of God from the idolaters. If the use of swine's flesh, for instance, was forbidden to the Jews because their heathen neighbours offered it in sacrifice, why not the flesh of oxen or of sheep? Nothing, indeed, can be more clear than that restrictions of every sort and kind, such as an inconsiderate reader of Scripture might be tempted to call vexations and nothing less, were wound about the followers of Moses; and that every day and every hour of the day, in the ordinary and extraordinary duties of life, the most circumspect Israelite must have found himself driven to oblations and ablutions, by sins of ignorance, of inadvertence, and even of the merest accident. Now such a scheme contemplated with a close and constant reference to the great doctrine of a Redeemer to

come, even as it is by St. Paul in the second and third chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, and indeed in all his Epistles; such a scheme regarded as a contrivance for stopping every man's mouth so that all the world may become guilty before God; the Mosaical law, I say, so construed, is at once intelligible and satisfactory; but let it once be measured by the ordinary rules applicable to human laws, by the ends they propose to themselves, and the means they take for securing those ends, and nothing can be more anomalous; for what a principle would a legislator be thought to adopt who in the concoction of his laws, manifestly made it his aim to bring every man in the land under its penalties and pains!

For all these reasons therefore, I cannot conceive how the point can be mooted that at any rate, Moses, even though he should

be regarded as a mere politician, ‘is entitled to the highest rank among the benefactors of mankind, as having been the first who attempted to regulate society by an equal written law’<sup>a</sup>—the very character of that law being enough in itself to exclude any political hypothesis; and the mere suggestion of its possibility betraying, as appears to me, an imperfect acquaintance with the structure of the law itself; an insensibility to the mysteries which are certainly lurking throughout it; I will not say an unconsciousness, but at least a want of an adequate impression that the place whereon the historian stood was holy ground.

On the whole, the law of Moses was framed perhaps with a view, amongst other views, to try the faith of its expositors. It was read in one sense by the Sadducee, in

<sup>a</sup> Hist. of the Jews, i. 161.

another by the woman of Samaria; the former could see in it ‘neither resurrection nor angel nor spirit’, the latter could see in it that ‘Messias which was to come and tell all things.’<sup>a</sup> So divers might be the interpretations thereof; so meetly was it composed for discovering who was the ‘*wise servant*’. For ourselves at this time of day, to be unresolved as to its nature, there is less excuse. If its peculiar capacity for figurative application; if the scattered glimpses of high and holy things which it offers, reaches as it were into the abysses of the firmament; if the intentional multiplication of its prohibitions and commands, touch not, taste not, handle not, onerous to a degree that must have merely served to exasperate had they been understood to convey no ulterior lesson; if these features suffice not to mark it with a

<sup>a</sup> John iv. 25.

character altogether its own, savouring of things other than earthly; still the language of the Psalmist concerning it, the language of the Prophets, the language of St. Paul, the language of the Lord himself, ought surely to rescue it from misconception with every professing Christian, and forbid it to be confounded with the statutes and ordinances of man.

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## LECTURE VII.

## CREDIBILITY OF MIRACLES.

## PSALM CXL. 2.

*The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them  
that have pleasure therein.*

IN further allusion to the work of which I have already spoken so frequently, it is my intention in this Lecture to expose the futility of all attempts to explain the miracles of the Mosaic History upon the principle of *second causes*; and to point out some considerations which appear to render any such device for procuring assent to their credibility, needless.

On the first part of the question I shall waste but few words. It is possible that in some instances a seeming miracle may admit of being explained by a second cause. The

bitter waters of Marah might be sweetened by the natural virtue of the plant cast into them. The raiment of the Israelites might not wax old in their forty years' pilgrimage through the wilderness by reason of their working up the materials with which their flocks supplied them, or of their intercourse with the caravans of the traders. But if it be admitted that in these and a few other cases the principle of second causes may be applied successfully to account for what at first sight appears miraculous, will that principle apply in all cases?—and if its application be not universal, as in this instance its advocate does not pretend, where is its value in rendering Scripture more palateable to unbelievers, which is the object, I suppose, in the use of it? It may be true that manna is now found in the desert as a natural production; that it is collected before sun-rise,

and dissolved, if not collected, before noon ; but it is not contended that on the sixth day twice as much can be gathered as on any other day. It may be true that the upper part of the Red Sea may be now forded, and with the advantage of a peculiar and strong wind, dry-shod ; but it is not discovered that the waters stand as a wall on the right hand and on the left, nor yet that a pillar of cloud and fire is seen presiding over the passage. *Miraculous*, undoubtedly, the Mosaic history claims to be, and by no ingenuity whatever can it be purged of its miracles. It remains therefore only to consider whether there be any thing in this its miraculous character which can justly be an offence to a reasonable man.

Now it should seem that this disposition to mitigate miracles by a recourse to second causes arises from not bearing in mind the

object which the Deity may be supposed to have before Him, chiefly, if not solely, in his management of the physical world at all times; that there is strong reason to believe that his views do not terminate in the well-being of that world, considered independently and in itself; that the regularity of its system does not seem to be the proper end which the Almighty proposes to Himself to effect; that such regularity He does indeed order, but still with an ulterior and nobler aim; that there is much cause for thinking that the scheme of the *natural* world was at first constructed, and has been conducted since, with a reference to the scheme of the *moral* world; that the one is in subordination to the other, as the less to the more worthy; and that the natural system cannot be regarded without error, unless it be regarded as standing in this *inferior relation*. For it

will make a very wide difference in our judgement of the physical system in which we live, both its nature and working, whether we contemplate it as an end or only as a means to an end. If as an end, the notion of any derangement in its parts may shock us, because it would argue imperfection in the plan. If as a means to an end, then no presumption would lie against such occasional derangement, unless it shall seem that the derangement tended to frustrate the end, much less, on the contrary, if it should seem to promote it. The movement of a loom is regularity itself, but the object of the implement not being mere regularity but the fabric of a web to which such regularity is instrumental, it becomes not a flaw but a perfection in the contrivance that it admits of being thrown out of gear (as the phrase is); for this obstruction ministers to its ultimate

object, the fabric of the cloth, no less than its regularity. And he who should undertake to lecture upon the mechanism of the loom, and was ignorant of the purpose for which it was made, would infallibly fall into mistakes, particularly where its movements or the checks to its movements might seem to have in them something peculiar and out of character with the whole. I am aware of the danger of illustrations on subjects like the present. I do not therefore contend for every conclusion which might be drawn from pushing the parallel to an extreme. At the same time the most obvious objection of all, that in the case of the machine, the necessity of such suspension of its laws implies defect, I am not careful to guard against; defect it certainly does imply *somewhere*, but it may be quite as well in the material as in the maker or the machine; and perhaps the ne-

cessity for miraculous interpositions implies defect too, not in God however, but in man, for whose moral welfare it is probable that miracles would not have been wanted, had he not fallen from his innocence, or in other words had he not been created free; a position surely not impeaching the perfection of God's workmanship.

I apprehend therefore that if it can be established, *First*, that the natural world bears very strong marks of being at all times in subordination to the *moral*, as an instrument to an end:

And *secondly*, that the moral world may sometimes require for its well-being irregularities in the operation of this its instrument, we shall remove a stumbling-block out of the way of the acceptation of miracles, and relieve ourselves from the necessity of accommodating them to the taste of a false

philosophy by a fruitless attempt to resolve them into second causes.

I. 1. Now in general, it may be said, that the vegetable bears every appearance of being made for the animal, the animal for the rational creation. They have clearly a connection one with another. There is amongst them a strict relation in bulk, in quality, and in adaptation of parts; and certainly the links of this relation cannot be taken in any other order than the one I have assigned. It would be difficult to suppose the man made for the sheep, or the sheep for the pasture.

2. Again—the human frame gives token of being formed for the human soul within it, that is, the material for the moral part; the members being merely convenient tools for the functions which the soul has to exercise, and care being taken in the substance or

collocation of them that the safety of the soul, (I mean so long as it is entrusted to the body's keeping,) shall be secured; that portion of the body which is her chief seat, being carefully deposited in a strong box of bone, evidently constructed with a view to the safe custody of a treasure of great price; and with a like consultation for her continuance in the body, the pipes necessary for the passage of the animal fluid which promotes such continuance, are carefully placed as much as possible out of harm's way, *laid deep*, whilst others of the same nature but charged with less important functions, are superficial and exposed; a provision of the same kind as that of a conduit for a garrison which is sunk low in the earth lest accident should betray it to the enemy, and it be cut off. The whole arrangement bespeaking, so far as it

goes, the subservience of the physical to the *moral*, as a means to an end.

3. Again. If this relation of parts in the individual argues such a truth, so does the relation of individuals to their whole species. It is difficult, almost impossible, to explain the positions in which mankind are placed with respect to one another, on any principle but that of a regard for moral interests. The helpless condition in which we are at first born, and in which we are a long time condemned to abide, a defective provision, as it should seem, in itself, whereby multitudes are made to consume the resources of their mother earth, perhaps the scanty resources, who die before they can refund, and all that has been spent upon them perishes; but a process nevertheless which, if regarded in its moral aspect, is full of beauty and blessing,

for it propagates the charities of father, son, and brother. The rapidity with which generations of men come and go, upon the earth, like the other, a scheme, evil as it may be thought in itself, for it peoples the world at a vast, at a prodigal expence of life; it removes one race of beings merely to substitute for them another race of the same kind, who are to occupy the same station, and thus multiplies the sorrows of death; but still viewed in its moral effects, the plan becomes not only intelligible but satisfactory; it fills this world with activity and energy, with enterprize and eagerness, with sobriety and foresight, with caution and self-restraint, and it furnishes multitudes of citizens for the world which is to come.

4. Again. The physical properties of the various substances with which we are surrounded, exert in general both directly and

indirectly, both in themselves and in their manipulation, so extensive an influence upon the moral beings (merely considered as such) whom they affect, that it is not possible to suppose that such influence did not enter very largely into the reckoning of the Creator; that it was not intended, calculated, and contrived; a consideration indeed to which the heathens themselves were alive, so obvious is it. Darkened as were their understandings, they could not fail of reading in the world around them manifest tokens of this ulterior purpose for which it was framed. Its Maker, according to their interpretation of the signs before them, had shaped it so as to stimulate the latent energies of mankind for good; he had moderated the prolific bounties which he would otherwise have showered as from an urn, expressly with a view to human improvement; for this cause

he would not suffer the sea to be still, nor the leaves to drop spontaneous honey, nor the rivers to flow with wine, nor fire to be found on the earth, in order that the faculties of man might be turned to the investigation of the arts, that he might learn to extract corn from the furrow and the spark from the flint, and to launch his hollow tree upon the waters and to guide it by the stars of heaven, and be led in short to industry and health of soul as well as body, by the necessary conditions of his being<sup>a</sup>.

5. Again. The comprehensive range of consequences, of *moral* consequences, which are often seen to flow from the new development of some physical fact inconsiderable perhaps in itself, seems still to tell that Providence had overlooked the meanness of his instrument in the majesty of his aim, and

<sup>a</sup> Virg. Georg. 1, 121 et seq.

that his chief object in rendering a trifle so pregnant must have been a moral one. The introduction into a country of a new root, the construction of a new tool, the application of a new power, changing the whole moral aspect of a whole empire; lands lately barren and waste where the fox had his hole, and the bittern his solitude, now teeming with beings born for immortality. The polarity of the magnet, a property that had slept from the foundation of the world, is discovered—I say discovered, though the process of invention is often so purely accidental that it should seem to indicate a Supreme Being giving out, of himself, the virtues of his material world to his rational creatures one by one, as they were ripe for them. The polarity of the magnet is discovered, in itself a toy for a child, and perhaps for a moment regarded as no more, but what vast effects

is the discovery charged with! What a commission has a little needle to open! What a spring does it give to the intercourse of the nations of the earth! How are the remotest of the isles now congregated! How active are they now in providing for each other's wants, means of mutual transfer being no longer precarious! What a stirring there is in our manufactories and marts! What a circulation of knowledge moral and religious is put in motion! Or, an air is detected capable of ignition, diffusing a cheap and brilliant light, and readily propelled into the darkest recesses of our towns. How may we bless the useful light for the *moral* benefits it sheds upon these monuments of Cain! The obstacle, more efficient than police, or judge, or gaol, or scaffold, the obstacle it opposes to the proceedings of men who shun the light being bent on deeds of darkness! In selecting these examples taken from the million, I am desi-

rous of fixing your attention to one single consideration, the apparent insignificance of the instrument as compared with the vast and various effects it is made to work; a needle's point propagating a code of laws perhaps over the round world; a stream of thin air purifying the morals of a multitude, and ministering to mankind on their march to immortality! I cannot but conclude that consequences so out of all proportion to the cause, were a *main* object, I do not say the *sole* object, but a *main* object of the Almighty's solicitude, (if I may venture so to speak,) in calling that cause into action, and that the tool with which it was His pleasure to work them out was fashioned by him with a view not to its own neatness, but to the magnificent workmanship which it was its glory to be employed upon. I have taken the case of comparatively modern discoveries in physics, because whilst our attention cannot but be

challenged by the vast *moral* consequences which manifestly flow from them, their novelty serving to awake in us such speculations, they at the same time must remind us of similar good offices to the moral system which are discharged by all those other physical arrangements with which we are most familiar, but which fail to strike us perhaps in the light of ministers to morals by reason of their being habitually presented to us under other and lower aspects.

6. Again. How far more august a character does the physical system assume; how far more manifestly does it betray the impress of God if regarded as subordinate to the *moral* system, than if viewed as final in itself. Its mountains, its mines, its rivers, its seas, its vapours, its influences, at once become clothed with a majesty not their own.

The Lord is in the whirlwind, the Lord is in the fire—at once the world is taken effectually out of the hands of chance or of any creative principle of any kind, but such as is moral in its nature and office. A consideration, which marks the spirit, I may venture to observe, in which physical science should be pursued, and which dictates that the moral bearing of the subject under investigation should never be lost sight of in the material; the latter being probably a secondary object only with the great Contriver. A consideration too, I will add, which prescribes to the possessors of physical property, to the lords of the soil, the rule by which they should dispense their estates; even the same by which the Lord of all dispenses His, seeking to make them subservient to the moral welfare of moral creatures. Meanwhile the

beauty of the physical system, considered simply as a piece of mechanism is thus in no degree impaired; *that* is left just where it would be, were it to be beheld only as a curiosity of art; whilst the reflection that beautiful as it is whilst thus contemplated, fitted as it is to fill our hearts with amazement at its Maker even then, this is after all but a low and unworthy view to take of it; that its ulterior office is its paramount office after all; that if it does serve marvellously well the life which now is, still its great glory is that it is gradually adapting myriads of moral beings to a more brilliant life that is to be; such reflection, I repeat, gives a dignity to the creation which it could never assume as a physical structure merely, however exquisite its workmanship.

7. And in general; the very obvious manner in which the aspect of the earth is affected by the moral conduct of its inhabit-

ants—the livery it wears in reference to that conduct—declares the strict sympathy which subsists between the natural and moral order of things; the fields themselves telling as plainly as if they could speak, whether their occupier is industrious or indolent; the sinews of a man's strength, whether his life is pure or profligate; the fatness of a land, whether its government is temperate or tyrannical.

Now did we arrive at the conclusion that the natural world is made in subordination to the *moral*, by a single process of reasoning, there might possibly be some mistake. But when we see so many independent arguments all having the same issue; when we take up successively new positions from which to observe nature, and still find them all presenting her before us, in this uniform aspect at least, whatever variety there may be in other features, there seems no room for error.

II. Regarding therefore this principle as established, namely, that the natural world, is made with a view to the *moral* world, we must now consider upon what plan it would be likely to be administered in order to secure the end; whether any could be imagined more convenient, than a system working according to *general laws* in the main, but subject to a *suspension* of those laws upon occasion —which is the second division of my subject.

Now it is very plain, that the welfare of the moral system would require strict regularity in the working of the natural system on the whole: a system of disorder or of perpetual expedient being extremely unpropitious to the improvement of moral beings; a system proceeding according to fixed laws highly conducive to it. Upon no other plan indeed could there be any exercise of foresight, a

most essential ingredient in a course of moral discipline, any punctuality, any industry, any prudence, any calculation of cause and consequence; so that life would become a mere casual existence, a voyage without chart, without star, without compass, without harbour. The fact therefore that the world is made to move for the most part according to *certain laws*, is so far from raising any presumption against the theory I advocate, that it tends to confirm it; such laws being absolutely necessary for the object proposed. At the same time it is equally plain that occasional, though rare, deviation from these rules in the course of nature, would minister to the same object, the encouragement of morals, no less; and if so, then there is nothing incredible in such deviation, but the contrary, so long as we look upon nature not as something

sacred and unchangeable, but as an instrument to an end.

1. First, then, a course of nature subject to no interruption whatever, would be apt to disqualify men for reasoning at all upon religious subjects; to lay all such curiosity asleep. We may behold the sun bathing the world in light a whole year through without a thought; he expires in an eclipse and furnishes us with food for meditation. Yet abstractedly the spectacle of his brightness is far more striking than that of his extinction. The heathen poet of old had yielded himself up to the drowsy influence of the philosophy of his time, and troubled not himself about a God. But when he chanced to hear the thunder rolling through an azure sky, his attention was arrested, and he was an atheist no more.

It would be a property therefore of extra-

ordinary interpositions to qualify the minds of men for entertaining the subject of a spiritual world.

2. A course of nature subject to no interruption whatever would tend to withdraw the minds of men, (even if they did apply them to the question,) from an intelligent First Cause; to extinguish, or at least to impair, the idea of a God; extreme regularity being found, according to our experience, a quality of mechanical rather than of intellectual agents. And this was, therefore, peculiarly the objection of the scoffers concerning whom St. Peter speaks; they were hard to be persuaded of any final advent of a Judge, for “where” say they, “is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things *continue* as they were from the beginning of the creation”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> 2 Peter iii. 4.

The unbroken continuity, as they pretended, of the system in which they lived, was the stumbling block to their faith. It would be a property then of extraordinary interpositions to inspire a belief in an intelligent First Cause.

3. A course of nature subject to no interruptions whatever would tend to annihilate the belief of a perpetual Providence; an occasional interposition, on the contrary, would satisfy us that the Maker had never abandoned his own work; that He was ever quickening it, even at moments when its movements might seem the most regular and mechanical. It would realize to us the active presence of God, and possess our souls with the comfortable assurance that we had Him ever at our right hand, howbeit we beheld Him not; that He is with us at our down-sitting and uprising; when we are in danger, and when we are in distress;

if sick, that we have in Him the unseen physician; if poor, the unseen benefactor; if strangers, the unseen friend; if oppressed, the unseen champion; if dying, the unseen guide and guardian of our fearful and faltering spirits. It gives wings therefore to our prayers, feeling as we in this case do, that we are not struggling in our petitions against a steady stubborn frame of things, blindly beating on, intolerant of a touch, even though it be the touch of God, but that we are pouring our wants into the willing ears of a Great Being who has our moral welfare at heart; who can hear and answer; who can alter without deranging; who can mould nature in the hollow of his hand, and work up the accidents of our life to our weal or to our woe without disturbing the economy of his universe.

4. A course of nature subject to no inter-

ruption whatever would render God's creatures less sensible to the harmony with which His providence acts upon the whole. The extreme beauty of the general order which prevails would be less observed; as the shock it is that informs us of the smoothness of the road, or the earthquake of the earth's stability. It would be the property therefore of extraordinary interposition, to impress upon mankind the wonderful wisdom of God at all seasons, and so to make them praise and reverence Him.

5. Interruptions in the course of nature evidently introduced for man's benefit have another advantage still, for when we see that the Maker of the world actually goes out of his way, as it were, to suspend his own laws for the convenience of man, how can we do otherwise than acknowledge the benevolence of God, his great good-will to

man; and accordingly how can our love fail of waxing warmer towards Him?

Other benefits there might be, resulting from the dispensation of which I speak; so that on the whole it would appear that no system, as far as we can judge, could be contrived, better adapted to the moral welfare of mankind, than a system that should move for the most part according to general laws; those laws however subject to occasional, though rare, suspension, alteration, or check. And it is probable that for all these religious benefits, in whatsoever degree we experience them, a disposition to ponder upon a world unseen, a belief in an intelligent First Cause, in a Superintending Providence, an admiration of the order which reigns in the universe, and of the benevolence it be-speaks, we are unconsciously indebted in a great measure to the tradition of miracles

done in the old time, which has descended to us, and the very agitation of which question animates us more than we are aware, to wholesome thoughts. Did we possess a Revelation which made no pretensions to miracles, (were it possible to have such and to believe in it;) were there no fame of a miracle worked in the world, and so the subject of miraculous agency had never been familiar to our minds; I cannot think that the healthy tone of which I have spoken would have been preserved to them effectually, if at all. I say this in reply to an objection that might be offered, that if the value of miracles be such as I have described and the necessity of them so imminent, why have they ceased?—Ceased indeed they have, but it is not as if they never had been; they still live in their effects; and though they have passed, they have left behind them a wake

which still bears us along with it.—And if it be further objected that the apparatus of this universe is far too vast for the office we assign it; that the theatre is too magnificent for the drama; what is man that he should be so considered, or the son of man that he should be so regarded? it may be answered, that the dignity of a being whose destinies stretch forward to eternity, much more of millions of such beings, may well surpass any estimate that can be formed of it in matter or in the properties of matter; and that the virtue which according to our view, goeth out of our system for the promotion of moral ends, may attain, for aught we know to the contrary, to other orders of beings far more in number and far more exalted in station than the children of men.

We have only therefore to satisfy ourselves of the probability of our principle that the

first object of the Deity in the construction and continuance of his handiworks is to advance the *moral* welfare of the accountable creatures which he has brought into existence, and then, both the ordinary and extraordinary parts of his reputed plan become alike credible. Even as it is with human actions; there, a carriage altogether inexplicable, nay incredible upon any other grounds, becomes at once intelligible and worthy of belief when we take some moral purpose which it is meant to serve, for our key. How strange, for instance, is it to see a fond and indulgent parent scourging his child and sparing him not for his crying! a most affectionate relative submitting his dearest kindred to severe, nay what would be in common cases, cruel, constraint! A most humane judge doing violence to his heart whilst his tongue dooms the evil-doer to death! Nay it is possible to

conceive cases where a community devoted to husbandry should order all its crops to be laid waste; or to mechanism, and command all its machinery to be broken up; or one which had directed all its efforts to the construction of barriers against the river or the sea, ordaining that its embankments shall be cut down; yet all these matters, though utterly at variance, apparently so at least, with the principles by which such individuals or societies were known to be governed in general; though calculated to excite surprise, no doubt, when viewed independently of the motives which prompted them, are allowed at once to be natural and consistent with the ordinary conduct of the parties, as soon as we are made aware that a great moral purpose was involved in them.

Still I have not maintained, though perhaps maintained it might be, that the Al-

mighty Maker of the universe, in the multitude and complexity of its parts, locked into one another as they are so intimately, each member evidently contributing to manifold functions besides those which seem proper to it, has constructed his fabric with a view to a moral end and to *no other*; neither that the material elements amongst which we live, can in all their combinations and qualities, be seen distinctly to work with a reference to that end, or at least with any thing like an *exclusive* reference to it. My argument only requires that this should be the case to a very great extent; that a *moral* purpose should be a very leading principle consulted in the physical arrangement of things, and so much my experience confirms to be a fact.

Accustoming ourselves therefore to contemplate the scene of nature about us under

this aspect, (which I believe to be the true view to take of it,) I think we shall find little inclination, because little inducement, to reduce the miracles of which Scripture speaks, to a scale of more moderate pretensions, and so betray a distrust in the strength of our position, without disarming, disabling, or conciliating our antagonist. Rather shall we be disposed to believe that at the command of a prophet of God, the waters did stand on a heap, because we shall not limit our notions of any of the elements to their physical properties merely, but regard them all, ‘fire and hail, snow and vapour, wind and storm’, in this light the foremost of all, as ‘fulfilling his word’. Then shall we not be surprised at the meanest of his creatures doing his behest as we find it asserted, even to the botch, the emerod, the mildew, the dust, the canker-worm, the locust, and the

lice ; for they are no longer in our sight things of nought, but God's vast and various army marching under orders. Then we shall not stumble at any commands which God may give them in charge to execute, however at variance they may seem to the rules which He prescribes for their ordinary observance, seeing that the message and not the messenger is the point on which our eye will fix. And then shall we not wonder if at the last, when the natural world shall have done the work whereunto it is mainly appointed, the whole fabric shall be broken up, like a machine that is done with, a mould out of date, and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up <sup>a</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> See Psalm cii. 25.-28.

## LECTURE VIII.

INCIDENTAL EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF  
OUR LORD.

1 COR. xv. 14.

*If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and  
your faith is also vain.*

LET the resurrection of our Lord from the dead as described by the evangelists be once fairly established as a matter of fact, and I think that every candid inquirer after truth, (and with no other would I wish to dispute,) that every such person, dismissing the objections which speculative ingenuity may raise against the Gospel, will be disposed at once frankly and freely to assent to the character which Jesus claimed and the doctrines which he taught, instinctively exclaiming with the soldier, ‘ verily this was the Son

of God.' So argues St. Paul, ' Declared,' says he, ' was Jesus to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness, *by the resurrection from the dead.*'<sup>a</sup>

Now waving the many, and the unanswered, arguments which have been urged in support of this stupendous event,—the body not furtively removed to a disciple's chamber, but begged of Pilate, examined by the soldiers whether it were dead, deposited in a sepulchre of which the situation and condition were subjects of public notoriety; the body not produced, on the rumour that it had revived getting abroad, though its production would have been the simple way of extinguishing that rumour effectually and for ever; the body not stolen, for though under other circumstances such a tale would have been extremely plausible, it was refuted by

<sup>a</sup> Rom. i. 4.

the very act and deed of the chief priests and pharisees themselves, who anticipating such an attempt set the watch, contributing thereby (blindfold as they did it) most unwittingly to the testimony of that very miracle which it was their object to suppress ; waving, I say, these and other arguments which have been advanced upon the resurrection, I will narrow the question to a single point, namely, the extraordinary difference manifested in the character and conduct of the disciples before this reputed event and afterwards ; a difference not so much asserted as implied, implied without being explained ; and the argument therefore not so much founded upon *direct* evidence, as upon that which is vastly more satisfactory, *incidental*.

Instead however of taking the case of the disciples generally, I will take the in-

dividual case of *Peter*; both for the sake of greater precision, and because in Peter more circumstances concur illustrative of our inquiry than in any other of the followers of our Lord. Now Peter is clearly presented to us in two aspects. His former and latter self, though having common features enough to identify the man, do offer a very singular contrast; a contrast which Jesus foresaw would arise, when shortly before his Passion, He said unto him, ‘when thou art converted,’ as though his conversion was yet to come, ‘strengthen thy brethren.’ True it is that an extraordinary illapse of the Holy Ghost had been vouchsafed in the mean season at the day of Pentecost; but a change in Peter manifests itself even before that day; and besides, the Spirit itself passes its virtue to the head and to the heart whether to convince or to convert, through means. What then if a

principal means in the present instance was, the *Resurrection of Jesus from the dead?*

Peter, a fisherman, having an honest heart and a high spirit, but apparently ill-informed in Moses, and the prophets who spake of Jesus, and from the study of whose words the woman of Samaria had collected his real nature and office, received a call from a mysterious stranger. He obeyed the call; left the nets; and followed him as a disciple; satisfied that he was attaching himself to no ordinary person, by reason of the miraculous powers with which he saw him endowed; and having a vague and indefinite notion of a Messiah to come about that season, (for such an expectation was general,) a temporal prince who should redeem Israel; a suspicion moreover that this might be he of whom the world was to witness the glory; and a hope withal that his own fortunes would be bound

up with those of his Master. After a while, however, Peter is commissioned not to go forth and conquer, but to go forth and preach : and power to heal sickness and cast out devils is imparted to him. But neither does this open his eyes to the nature of our Lord himself, or of the kingdom which he was founding, for to a question put by Jesus to his disciples, ‘ whom say ye that I am?’ Peter’s answer was indeed ‘ thou art the Christ,’ but on Jesus proceeding to set forth the things that were coming upon him, Peter not finding them square with his own idea of a Messiah, and unwilling to renounce it, for it was an ambitious dream, took him and began to rebuke him<sup>a</sup>. As yet therefore he had no open vision. In course of time he is admitted to be an eye witness of the transfiguration, and was of those who were com-

<sup>a</sup> Mark viii. 32.

manded by our Lord ‘to tell no man the things they had seen, till the Son of man was risen from the dead.’<sup>a</sup> But clear as this communication seems to us, it was not so to them. So figurative was the language of the Jews, and so little prepared were the hearers of this saying, ‘unlearned and ignorant men,’ by their study of prophecy, for a literal acceptance of it, that they only ‘questioned one with another *what the rising from the dead should mean.*’ Still therefore the understanding of Peter was holden touching this high mystery. Later yet, Jesus in confidential intercourse with his disciples as they traversed Galilee together, spake again of his own death and of his rising from the dead the third day, but still the words fell upon ears unprepared to hear them and ‘*they understood not that saying* and were

<sup>a</sup> Mark ix. 9.

afraid to ask him <sup>a</sup>; afraid, by reason of that awe with which the disciples of Jesus seem ever to have been impressed, notwithstanding their daily and intimate communion with him, so that their language towards him, even at moments when they might be supposed to be least guarded, has usually something in it of reverential reserve, meant perhaps, or if not meant, calculated, to have an influence on the forms of devotion to be adopted by those who should come after them, and not friendly (as it should seem) to those familiar appeals to the Saviour in which honest but presumptuous rapture has sometimes indulged.—The last passover approaches. The apostles, Peter amongst the rest, are afraid to go up to Jerusalem; and though at last they overcome their fears, Jesus is suffered to set out alone <sup>b</sup>. He is

<sup>a</sup> Mark ix. 32.

<sup>b</sup> Ib. x. 32.

betrayed and made prisoner. Peter follows his Master, but it is ‘afar off.’ He lingers about the palace of the high-priest to see the end, but he mingles with the crowd. He is challenged by the maid servant with being one of that man’s disciples, but he denies it with an oath. He shrinks from too near an approach to the cross, standing apparently with the others at a distance. He leaves it to an honourable man, but comparatively a stranger to Jesus, to beg and bury his corpse; and to the women (whose fearless affection for their friend, here as so often puts the stronger sex to shame,) to bring spices and embalm it. Where is the expectation that this body was not to see corruption, in all this? Where, in what ensues? Was Peter, or were any of our Lord’s followers watching the tomb; counting the lingering hours till the third day should

dawn; straining their very eye-balls to catch the first heaving of the great stone as it made way for the Son of man to come forth? No such thing. Jesus was now no more to them than one of the departed. The hope that it was he which should have redeemed Israel, was, according to the confession of his disciples on their way to Emmaus, extinct. The ceaments that were prepared, were for a body that was to perish. The haste that was made, (for it was all that could be made consistently with resting on the Sabbath,) was the haste of friends who would anticipate, if possible, its natural and offensive decay. Their previous conversation was the conversation of those who expected to find the vault as they left it, ‘ who shall roll us away the stone?’ Their surprise, a surprise arising merely from the absence of the body, ‘ they have taken away the Lord out of the

sepulchre, and we cannot tell where they have laid him'; a surprise in which Peter, to whom the tidings are brought, partakes, for as yet '*they knew not the Scripture that he must rise again from the dead*'<sup>a</sup>. He sees indeed the linen clothes lying, and above all, the napkin not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself; a trifle, but still an argument that the body had been deliberately removed, and he withdrew, 'wondering in himself at that which was come to pass'<sup>b</sup>. Such was the state of Peter's mind, (nor of his only, but a single example is convenient,) up to the very moment when our Lord stood confessed before him, 'for he was seen of Cephas'<sup>c</sup>. The ocular proofs of his return to life which Jesus subsequently thought fit to afford to his disciples, are expressed with the utmost possible

<sup>a</sup> John xx. 9.    <sup>b</sup> Luke xxiv. 12.    <sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 4, 5.

brevity by all the Evangelists, the notoriety of the fact superseding, as they might think, the necessity of many particulars. Three out of the four comprise them in a few verses; and St. John who is more explicit than the rest, and who besides gives an account of the Lord's appearance at the sea of Tiberias to Peter and his companions as they are fishing, enters into no long or laboured details. Any strange or striking effects wrought upon the minds of those who were witnesses of the Resurrection—the strong faith—the bright hopes—the pean over death which they could now sing and shout, victorious though it might yet be for a moment, are all hushed; and instead thereof, (who shall tell of the Evangelists as enthusiasts?) instead thereof, we find it noted, in the midst of a scene of unearthly grandeur, the Lord of Life, whom but a few days before, the nails and the spear

had pierced, standing on the lake-side and calling to his ‘children’; we find it recorded, I say, even here, that the net was still dragged to land two hundred cubits; that it was full of great fishes, an hundred fifty and three; that nevertheless it brake not. The curtain now closes over the disciples. We lose sight of them for a short season; till in the Acts of the Apostles they re-appear, but no more to be the men they have been.

Peter we have left evidently perplexed by the character of Jesus; never able fully or indeed nearly to make himself master of it; often falling into gross and grovelling mistakes concerning it; if ever obtaining at some propitious moment a glimpse of its real nature, again blinded; and to the very last a timid, indecisive, halting disciple, with none of that fervid self-abandonment to which he of all men would have soon resigned himself, had

he been fully possessed with a belief that the humble teacher whom he had attended, had for his name, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

An interval elapses; and what do I find him on meeting with him again? No longer the reed shaken with every wind; no longer the disciple of a doubtful mind, faithful and faithless by turns, now the apostle and now the apostate; but the sure and stedfast rock upon which a church may be built; teaching and preaching Jesus Christ in all boldness; appealing to the Prophets; resorting to the temple openly in the face of day; avowing the authority, the hateful authority by which he could make the lame walk, and glorying in the avowal; charging his countrymen, even the highest and haughtiest amongst them, with the murder of the Just One; brav-

ing the prison-house rather than hold his peace upon a subject touching which his heart was hot within him, for says he, ‘ we *cannot* but speak the things which we have seen and heard’<sup>a</sup>; released, and again in bonds for the same offence; once more delivered from the stocks, and no sooner delivered than again in the courts of the Lord’s house, lifting up his voice as before, in defiance of priests and council, who could only marvel at the strength of a conviction which they could not understand, that seemed to blind its victim to all prospect of danger, that could not be lulled or alarmed out of a public confession of a name, and if leading to chastisement and chains, as it did, still cheering the sufferer with the brave consciousness that he was counted worthy of the shame.

Now if we narrowly observe St. Peter in

<sup>a</sup> Acts iv. 20.

this his second character, we shall discover one idea to be predominant in his mind, the *Resurrection of Jesus from the dead*. Every speech that he utters after we meet him again, proves that of this one great event, which had occurred in the interval, his mind was full. Doubtless Jesus had committed to him many doctrines to disperse amongst the people which might save their souls alive; but I find the Resurrection of Jesus to be the single idea that for a long while haunts him (so to speak) in every place, before every audience, in every argument. Not that the Evangelist is solicitous to draw our attention to this curious fact, for on the contrary it merely escapes from him in the overflowing of his narrative, but our attention being directed to the subject of evidence, it happens to strike us of itself.

Thus the disciples meet to advise respect-

ing a successor for Judas; Peter is the chief speaker; he opens the subject of their consultation; enlarges upon the circumstances of the death of the traitor; argues the propriety of filling up the place from which he fell; produces the prophetic declaration in the Psalms authorizing such appointment; and then adds, ‘ wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be *a witness with us of his Resurrection*’<sup>a</sup>. No doubt the party on whom the lot might fall, whoever he might be, was to preach the gospel, to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, to heal diseases, to do in short all the work of an Evangelist; but these

<sup>a</sup> Acts i. 22.

are not the things that present themselves at the moment to Peter's thoughts; of these matters he says not a syllable; the *testimony of the Resurrection* is the all-engrossing idea of his mind, and to that he gives emphatic utterance.

No great while afterwards occurs the day of Pentecost, the miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost, and the gift of tongues. There were those however upon that occasion who mocked the apostles, and said, 'these men are full of new wine.' Upon this Peter rises in defence of himself and his brethren; refutes the slander; applies a passage of the prophet Joel to the scene of that day; and then addressing himself to the topic which in the present state of his mind superseded every other; 'Ye men of Israel,' says he, 'hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and

wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom,' he continues, '*God hath raised up*, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand that I should not be moved. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope, because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch

David,' (mark the delight with which he enlarges upon this part of his argument!) 'that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ; he seeing this before, spake of the *Resurrection of Christ*, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus', then he again repeats, '*hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*'<sup>a</sup>

The next transaction in which I find Peter engaged, is the miraculous cure of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. The people run together greatly wondering; but says that Apostle, 'Why marvel ye at this, ye men of Israel, or why look ye so earnestly on us, as

<sup>a</sup> Acts ii. 32.

though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk. The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his son Jesus, whom ye delivered up and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just and desired a murderer to be granted unto you. And killed the Prince of Life *whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses*:<sup>a</sup> Still we see the same leading idea in Peter's harangue ; the burden with which his mind labours ; the turn which his argument speedily takes, be the direction in which it begins what it may. But the good deed done to this impotent man is not yet suffered to rest. On the morrow Peter and John are examined before the priests. Again Peter rises up with

<sup>a</sup> Acts iii. 12.

all the eloquence of sincerity, and exclaims, ‘Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel ! be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, *whom God raised from the dead*, even by Him doth this man stand before you whole.’<sup>a</sup> And when his enemies would have descended to a compromise, letting him and his companions go, in consideration that they should thenceforth teach in the name of Jesus no more, he would hear nothing of such base concession, and boldly made answer, ‘whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.’ So effectually is he changed, short as the interval was, since, to save himself from danger, he even denied with an oath that he ever knew the man. Nay with such ‘great power’, it

<sup>a</sup> Acts iv. 10.

is added, ‘did the apostles *give witness of the Resurrection*’<sup>a</sup> (observe the expression!) that the multitude, regardless of all self-interest, the hardest thing in the world to tear out of men’s hearts, threw their possessions into a general fund, rich and poor, and lived in unreserved communion.

Still heedless of the caution administered to them by the priests, Peter and John offend again; are again taken before the council; are reproached with having filled Jerusalem with their doctrine, contrary to the injunction of silence which had been imposed on them. To all which Peter’s ready reply is, ‘the God of our Fathers *raised up Jesus*, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. *Him hath God exalted* with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.’<sup>b</sup> Still the Resurrection

<sup>a</sup> Acts iv. 33.

<sup>b</sup> Acts v. 31.

of Jesus is the beginning and the end of every speech of Peter, the single recollection that eclipses every other. And to follow him through one confession more; when convinced by the correspondence of his own vision with that of Cornelius that the door of mercy was open to the Gentiles also, and when he initiates Cornelius into the faith of Jesus, ‘We,’ says he, ‘are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. *Him God raised up the third day* and shewed him openly, not to all the people,’ (observe the exactness with which he enters into these favourite details,) ‘but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.’<sup>a</sup>

Such is Peter in his latter character; sted-

<sup>a</sup> Acts x. 40.

fast, as he was once wavering; and the cause of his stedfastness, I mean, as I have already said, the second cause, though never directly alleged, indirectly hinted, in the deep, the lasting impression which the Resurrection of Jesus had wrought in him; an impression which every syllable that drops from his lips after that event, clearly but incidentally betrays.

I think more satisfactory testimony to the reality of the Resurrection cannot be imagined, for it is not so much the testimony of assertion as of coincidence.

II. There is another circumstance, however, quite independent of the reasoning hitherto pursued, which strongly corroborates my argument. I have insisted upon the Resurrection as the *feature* of Peter's preaching, when he is presented to us in his second character; and I have contrasted it with his utter incapacity even to comprehend the doc-

trine in his first character. Now in complete but singular accordance with this change in the teacher, do I find the change in the teacher's persecutors.

The persecutors of Jesus and his disciples before the crucifixion are the *Pharisees* above all men ; but afterwards, the *Sadducees*. The distinction is very curious.

Thus Jesus himself evidently considers the *Pharisees* as the faction systematically opposed to him and to all the prophets—‘ Woe unto ye Scribes and *Pharisees*, hypocrites ’. ‘ Ye are the children of them which killed the prophets, fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.’<sup>a</sup> And before Jesus came up to the last Passover, ‘ the chief Priests and *Pharisees* ’, we are told, ‘ gave commandment that if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him.’<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xxiii. 29. 32.

<sup>b</sup> John xi. 57.

And that when Judas prepared to betray him ‘he received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and *Pharisees*.’<sup>a</sup>

But how was the case with the apostles, after that their Master was removed? Thus it was. ‘And as they (Peter and John) spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the *Sadducees*, came upon them.’<sup>b</sup> And on another occasion, ‘the high-priest rose up and all which were with him, which is the sect of the *Sadducees*, and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.’<sup>c</sup> And in like manner, when the personal history of St. Paul is submitted to us in the Acts of the Apostles in its turn, we may observe that he cleaves to the Pharisees as the friendly faction, and throws himself upon them for a protection

<sup>a</sup> John xviii. 3.      <sup>b</sup> Acts iv. 1.      <sup>c</sup> Ib. v. 17.

which the Sadducees would have probably refused him <sup>a</sup>.

Now, whence this unwonted exasperation of the Sadducees, the philosophers of Israel, the complacent quietists, who from the battlements of wisdom's temple, cast an eye of pity on their brethren below, who were wandering they knew not whither, after the way of life? or if not such, at least the sceptical disputants of the day, who occasionally descended to embarrass both sides of an argument, and support neither. What was it in Peter that now stung these temperate, tolerant, phlegmatic Gallios into the labour of persecution? Doubtless the vigorous propagation of this unpleasant doctrine of the *Resurrection*, for ‘the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection’; doubtless the violent assault made upon their darling dogma,

<sup>a</sup> Acts xxiii. 6. 9.

the corner-stone of their whole no-creed ; doubtless the triumph likely to accrue to the Pharisee, the odious Pharisee ; it being a serious grief to them to find that their old antagonists promised to have the better of them in the dispute, and that, alas ! to the life immortal they must needs be content to rise after all. And what can argue more plainly, though what less obviously, that the resurrection (as I have said) was become the burden of the apostles' preaching ; that it was regarded as the distinctive badge of their profession ; than this new host of assailants which was now called up ?

Look now, I entreat you, how *undesigned* is the testimony to the resurrection which I have laid before you from first to last ; for there lies its value : and let it be remembered that the task of culling out of the several speeches of Peter, reported in the first nine

or ten chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, such allusions as they contain to this one wonderful event, and of exhibiting them thus collectively before you, has been altogether an act of my own, not an act of the historian. They are certainly found, when so assembled, to be striking iterations of the same prominent article of faith ; enough to indicate how fully and forcibly this article had possession of the apostle's mind. But in the narrative itself, they are mixed up with other matters too numerous and too various to recount, so that it would be very possible for a reader of that narrative, on being taken by surprise, and asked what subject it was which ran like a thread through all that Peter is there made to utter, it would be very possible, I say, for him to be at a loss for an answer upon the instant. And still more possible would it be that he should have read the Gospels and

Acts, however recently and however attentively, and yet have failed to remark, what nevertheless is true, the singular fact, that in the *Gospels* the Pharisees are represented as the principal enemies of the cause of Christ, and the Sadducees in the *Acts*; a fact, arguing both a change in the complexion of the apostle's preaching, and the nature of the change, but surely in a manner the most oblique and casual that can be imagined.

Am I then mistaken in supposing that I have established, or all but established, these points,—that Peter (and he only one of several) felt all the conviction which a human being is capable of feeling, touching the resurrection of Jesus? Such a conviction as rendered him utterly insensible to any and every hazard, even the extremest, which his avowal of that conviction imposed? Such a conviction as was powerful enough in its

effects, to inspire the wealthier Christians of the day with a determination to make a voluntary abdication of their property, and fling it into a common fund, for the use of their poorer brethren? And to stimulate a sect, hitherto wont to repose in sceptical apathy, and to pride themselves on so doing, to the exercise of a cruel activity, for the purpose of extinguishing the wild-fire, as they would think it, which was devouring the land? Am I mistaken in supposing that I have upheld these truths, rather by inferential than positive evidence; by tracing effects which are given to a cause which is disregarded, or not at least produced as a cause; and a most remarkable alteration in the character and conduct both of individuals and of whole sects to one origin, as being all referable to it, though not formally referred

to it, even to the *resurrection of Jesus from the dead?*

Then is not our preaching vain, nor your faith vain. Brethren ! ‘I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come’, is the solemn profession of us all ; if it be the stedfast conviction of us all, let it appear ; let it work in us, as it did in Peter, a conduct and conversation agreeable thereto. Let us, like him, carry our faith into our life. Let us trade as men that have other merchandise. Let us build as men that expect other houses. Let us buy as men that look to parting with their possessions. Let us make our friendships as though we made them not for this world only. Let us sorrow as men not without hope. Let us live one with another as travellers together to the same land, and see

that we fall not out by the way. Let us frame and execute the laws, if such be our call, not as men-pleasers, but with a single eye to add ‘fellow-citizens to the saints.’ Let us let our estates, if we be landlords, as remembering the word of God, how he spake, ‘the land is mine, and ye are strangers and sojourners with me.’ Let us teach, if we be teachers, so as not to forget, in our praiseworthy zeal for science and letters, above all things, ‘the good and the right way.’ And if we be ministers, let us wait on our ministry; and, remembering that we shall one day have to present every one of our flocks unto Christ, let us by fervent exhortation, by fearless rebuke, by love unfeigned, by example blameless, prepare to present them without confusion of face: that so, having served God faithfully in our several vocations during our span of trial here, we may at last pass through

the gate and grave of death, to our joyful resurrection; for His merits who died and was buried, and rose again for us, Jesus Christ Our Lord.

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